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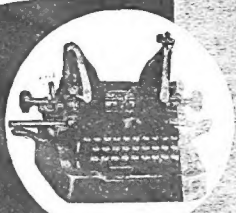

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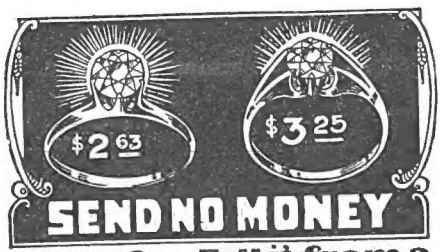

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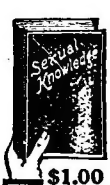

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Spring and Macdougal Streets - - New York City
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Entered as Second-Class Matter, October 1, 1910, at the Post-Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

Yearly Subscription, $4.00 in advance

Single Copy, Twenty-Five Cents

Foreign postage, $2.00 additional. Canadian postage, 60 cents.

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, reading, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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THE ROAD TO EL DORADO

By **HUGH PENDEXTER**

OF THE Indian who worshiped his hair; of the white man who worshiped a snakeskin; and of a score or more of characters who lived and drank and gambled and fought and died in Denver and thereabouts, in the late fifties. A novel by Hugh Pendexter complete in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

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Author of "The Singing Monkey," "The Alabaster Goddess," etc.

WILL LANGSTER always somehow reminded me of a thimblerigger's pea; not that he was very small, but that he was never where you thought he was. One moment when you were sure that he was in Timbuktu you would meet him as you strolled into Sherry's; if you were certain you would be able to find him there, you would see him coming out of a Busy Bee in the Bowery; when you were ready to bet that he was dead, a concussion on your shoulder-blades disillusioned you; and when you were convinced. . . .

I was a trooper in the British South African Police and was encamped in the middle of the ruins of what had once been, so they said, a Phœnician town. Anyway there are ruins all over the place around there; walls about two to three feet high marking out circles, squares, quadrangles, triangles and what not, as if a god had been teaching geometry to a school of giants. The *kopjes*, too, around this district, as at the great ruins at Zimbawbwe in the south, are full of old fortifications, and the steep hillsides are terraced, undoubtedly for cultivation, as in Syria and Greece.

I was stationed at Motokos, some ninety miles from Inyanga D Troop depot. According to instructions, some one had to go out to arrest an alleged murderer. There were three troopers and a sergeant at this out-station; one was sick, another was tired, so the youngest had to go. It was my turn anyway.

That the Mounted Police should be expected to arrest anybody save one another was considered a vast joke; we had always imagined that we were the goat.

However, this fellow, one Matakini—which being interpreted means the chigger flea who burrows in your toe-nails and there lays his eggs which your boy digs out with a needle—had come across the Portuguese border and was suspected of having killed a prospector who had disappeared about a few months before.

Another man, a stranger, was to meet me about half-way. I had information that the wanted man was somewhere hidden in the *kopjes* around and, being young, I was much excited, hoping to get him alone before the Inyanga man and my senior joined me.

Matakini had, according to report, some dozen of his own natives with him, well-armed, and was marching swiftly, avoiding *kraals*—though in this region there were

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very few villages—to get over the border again where we could not follow him. Next morning I intended to mount the best *kopje*, taking a signaler and leaving the other Black Watch—native police—hidden below, to watch a gap which I reckoned he was bound to pass through, and then ride to head him off, for he had no horse of course.

But as I was cooking some *kabobs* in front of my patrol tent one of my men reported a mounted white man approaching. I cursed because I was conceited enough to think that I didn't need help. He proved a little chap whom I had never seen before; but then I knew that there were a lot of new fellows at the depot at Inyanga. He was very swarthy and looked rather Jewish; some sort of colonial I thought him, or possibly Italian with an accent rather like Corporal Manzini's at Inyanga. I didn't take to him much. For one thing he was sloppy and yet flashy in a way, sporting a chased gold bangle on his hairy, skinny arm like a woman. He was in shirt sleeves, carrying his tunic strapped across his saddle-bow as we usually did; but his riding-pants looked as if they were as the quartermaster had given them out—about three sizes too big.

Most of us liked to dress smartly, having our regimentals altered at our own expense to fit everywhere instead of only in the places where they touched.

Ford had, he told me, sent his detachment of Black Watch to a certain point on the border where he had sure information that the Matakini was to ford the Ruania River. I was rather angry because I was certain that the fellow was in the vicinity, but as he was senior trooper I had no option.

We had supper and a drink of whisky which he had with him, and turned in; he was dead tired, he pleaded. He talked little; of Inyanga he said he knew nothing as he had only just been transferred from headquarters in Salisbury.

Next morning we made, as he insisted, for a point on the river where to my surprize was a large village. The chief, as usual, came out to greet us, as he was supposed to do, and sent us the usual food and moreover plenty of fish and wild honey. Ford seemed a sulky sort of creature and most of the time we had ridden in silence. The morning after that, according to his instructions, I dispatched my men to a point five miles down the river and I crossed with him.

Then no sooner had we landed on Portuguese territory, which we police were not supposed to do, than he turned suddenly and stuck a revolver under my nose. I was so startled at a man whom I had considered my fellow trooper turning upon me that for a few moments his words appeared utterly incomprehensible. Then slowly it dawned upon me that he was the murderer I was looking for—the Matakini!

He was. And he told me so with a grin and suddenly became very talkative. He thanked me sarcastically for having escorted him into safety, was very rude about my youth, wished to know whether the police ran baby-farms, ordered me off my horse and then commanded me to march in front of him.

I had to obey. To my demand to know where I was to go he laughed and refused to answer. I was young in those days. I cursed and wept with angry humiliation as I trudged along wondering desperately how he had obtained the uniform and what he could possibly want to do with me now that he was safe in Portuguese territory.

I was uncomfortably aware that he was a suspected murderer; and he looked it. The snarl of his mouth as he had jeered at me and the glitter of his black eyes were like a cat playing with a mouse. But what on earth could he wish to kill me for?

TEN miles farther on we came to a village, the chief of which was evidently in the pay of the Matakini. There I was ordered into a hut. As I entered a voice cried out—

"Thank God, you boys have come!"

In front of me was a fairish man standing in his shirt and underpants.

"Lord, but I'm mighty glad—" he went on, and then stopped as the Matakini's face appeared behind me.

"I breeng you another leetle infant for you to play!" he gibed and shut the door.

"Who on earth are you?" I asked bewilderedly.

The blue eyes glared at me angrily as if it were all my fault.

"D'you mean to tell me that that—" his words were regrettable if excusable— "—— put it over on you, too?"

"If you mean," said I, "that he captured

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me I'm afraid he did. But who are you?"

"Me?" The blue eyes changed to a laugh. "Same sort of a darn tenderfoot as you! I'm D troop from Inyanga."

"Oh, my lord!" I exclaimed. "The chap who was to meet me?"

"Sure."

We sat down and looked at each other ruefully. He proved to be one Billy Langster, an American—we had divers nationalities in the B. S. A. P.—whom I had not met before and as young as, and possibly a little bit angrier than I. The Matakini had somehow—watched from a *kopje* no doubt—seen that Langster had divided his force, sending a squad right and left to search the hills whilst he and five men had continued up the valley and walked right into an ambush in which the Matakini had shot outright the five Black Watch.

"But for what," I demanded, "has he taken us both? He could have shot either one had he wanted to, —— him."

"Search me," responded Billy. "The point is we've got to get out, and mighty quick. Whether he murdered that prospector fellow or not I dunno, but I'm not asking for an early grave."

"Nor me!"

Late in the afternoon the Matakini sent us some food, of which we were rather scary at first. However, there seemed no reason to poison us if he hadn't shot us. In the evening we noticed that the Matakini was evidently giving a dance to the *kraal* and our hopes rose.

As soon as they had apparently left us for the night we broke a gourd they had left with food and began scraping a tunnel underneath the mud-and-wattle wall at the back of the hut. Luckily the row of the tom-toms and chanting of the natives drowned the scuffling noise we had to make. It was devilish hard work in the sticky heat, but we rested scarcely a minute.

About two in the morning when the dance was going strong we had broken through. Our guard had stuck to his post all right, but was squatting by the door with both his ears stretched toward his luckier brothers. Fortunately the moon came up a little after we were clear of the village.

We ran the major portion of that ten miles to the Ruania, caring little for the lions that infest this district, and swam the river at the village with never a thought for a croc. We made the chief send runners to Motokos, for Billy couldn't walk, as his bare feet had been cut to pieces.

There was an awful shindy about the affair and we were court-martialed, but the case was squashed by "Lyddite," as our C. in C. was known. He ruled that our C. O. was at fault for having sent the most inexperienced youngsters apparently he could find. However, Billy and I became great pals and whenever we were together we spent our time plotting how we would yet get Mr. cube-root adjective Matakini; but we never found out what the Matakini intended to do with us then.

About eighteen months later the Boer War broke out; and while most of our troop was cursing because we couldn't join in the row we heard that poor Billy, who had been down at Umtali, had been chewed up by a lion. I was more than sorry, for I had liked him a lot and we had had a general agreement that when our time was in we would either go in trading together or set out to get the Matakini—whichever had depended upon the amount of exhilaration at the moment.

WHEN I got my ticket I with a bunch of bloodthirsty souls went down south. At Durban we heard that Kitchener had started a nice little corps of irregulars which seemed very inviting, a lovely little outfit from an adventurer's point of view; no pay, own horses and seventy-five per cent. of all confiscations, divided among the members of the corps, fifty-odd strong and all expert scouts.

The only trouble was that recruiting for this select party was in Pretoria only. I chanced my arm, as they say in the army, and putting up officer's tabs, bluffed my way up the line. I went all right as far as Elandsfontein Junction, where I was compelled to get a fresh pass for Pretoria, for the one which I had bought was for Johannesburg. Feeling pretty scared, for it meant three years at least if I were caught, I boldly walked into the office of the R. S. O. (Railway Staff Officer) and stared at a full-blown captain who was saying coolly:

"Hullo, Faxy, old boy! Where did you spring from?"

"For ——'s sake, Billy!" I gasped. "I thought you were inside a lion."

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"I was, ole buck," he grinned back; "inside a steam lion that bolted all the way to Beira. I found a steam whale there that spewed me upon the beach at Durban like Jonah. They winged me at Kameel *spruit* and I got dysentery and things, so I'm here for a soft job for a month or so. How's the Matakini?"

"Dunno," said I, "and don't care for the moment; but we must get the blighter yet when this show's over."

Of course I told him what I was after and he threatened to desert by way of another lion in order to join the Scouts with me. Well, the war petered out eventually, but I didn't see Billy until several years later. It was in New York; I found him with many females in Sherry's, doing in, as he told me, the result of a trip to the Russo-Jap War.

We revived old times, of course, over a matter of several weeks, drinking the Matakini's health most gorgeously; and then he went South to see his people.

Again time ran on. When I was in Borneo I heard a lot of talk among the Dutch officials of some man who had been playing old Harry on their pearl-fishing grounds. It seemed that this fellow and a Chinaman under the pretense of trade had been swiping fabulous sums of pearls—so they said—without the formality of paying license and taxes, and when they had sought to remonstrate by means of a warship he had headed a party of natives and bagged the cutter too.

I didn't guess who this enterprising chap could be until I got to Singapore. There every one was talking about a crazy American who had thrown money about like cigaret-ends and had left by the Messageries for Marseilles. Well, while I was signing the register at Raffles I saw in bold, scrawling characters, "Billy Langster."

I wandered on my erratic path, and after trying in my turn to pinch an empire, found myself with six pennies in a London doss-house. As I came into the common room, where you have the privilege of cooking your penny bloater, a dirty-looking object crouching in a corner let out a yell and sprang at me.

"Matakini! You old son of a gun!"

Billy once more of course—at the end of a dreadful bust. We left London and went on the road, where we saw something of English haystacks and damp weather and spent many pleasant hours telling yarns of our various adventures. At Liverpool Billy shipped for the States and I looked up a millionaire who had African interests and tried to be good in a job.

Old Dame Fortune gave the wheel another twiddle. Some three years later I found myself so short of ready cash in Port Said—I had taken the foresight to get a draft on Durban and had had the short sight to spend nearly all I had in Cairo—that I was compelled to take steerage to Mombasa on a German boat.

At Djibouti I met a mad Scot who had been up in the interior and would have joined in with him; but on our arrival at Beira, where we both went ashore to smell around for possibilities, whom should I see garbed in immaculate whites but dear old Billy. He was changed somewhat; fatter than usual and wearing a beard but not so boisterous as he had been, and at first more reticent. One thing I did notice was that he appeared to have forgotten the old war-cry of "the Matakini!" for all he said was—and that quietly—

"Faxy, by ——; the very man I'm praying for!"

He insisted upon dining us of course, but purposely avoided any reference as to what he was doing. When he knew that I was at a loose end he urged me to stay over a few days at least. The crazy Scot, who had money, went on back to the boat bound for Heaven-knows-where to carve a fortune with a ridiculous sword he carried, which he said had belonged to King Robert Bruce of Scotland. When he had gone Billy turned to me as we were sitting on the veranda and said quietly—

"I'm getting even with the Matakini."

"What!"

"*Sssh!* Come up to my room and I'll tell you the yarn."

II

WE HAD been sitting after dinner on the patio or veranda of the hotel on the street. From somewhere close came the tinkle of a mandolin and a throaty tenor wailing on the sticky night air. Billy's room was at the side with two fairly wide-open windows on to two streets, one very narrow with single-storied houses. Billy switched on the light—Oh yes, they had electricity even in those days in

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Beira—and made me comfy in a wicker chair by the wash-basin; and when we had our cheroots going he sprawled on the bed, which occupied the center of the room. He grinned at me and began—

"Faxy, d'you remember that yarn you told me camping under a —— damp tree in the Springtime in England—about an empire you tried to pinch?"

"Of course," said I; "but——"

"Well, old son of a gun, I've got one! A sure bet because I haven't got to bump up against a regular he-man power as you had."

"An empire! Where? Here?"

"Not in Beira, old sport, but not a five hundred miles away all the same. Sure thing, I'm telling you," he added in response to my incredulous stare. "No, it's not a hop-dream either. And you're going to come in."

"You bet," said I; "but——"

"But me no buts, you dismal *Hamlet!* Look here!"

He drew back his white sleeve, revealing a gold bracelet upon his forearm.

"Did you ever see one like that before?"

I stared; and association brought to me a swarthy, hairy arm, nearly black, which had worn a bracelet also.

"By —— yes; the Matakini!"

"That's right. Did you ever examine it? No? Well, *dekko* now."

On examination I saw that it was heavily chased in simple design which vaguely reminded me of something.

"Greek, isn't it—or Etruscan?"

"No; Phœnician or whoever those guys were who made those ruins at Zimbawbwe and around Motokos. Remember them?"

"Certainly I do. That's where I met the Matakini."

"Sure you did! So did I!" He laughed. "That's mighty queer. Never noticed that before. That's where I met him again; I mean in the same surroundings. You recollect we could never make out why he took us prisoners? Well, I've got an idea. All right; don't get mad at me," he added as I exhibited impatience.

He slid off his bed to get some more cheroots, fixed another seltzer and whisky and settled on the bed again.

"Look here; so's you'll get the hang of the whole thing I'd better go way back."

"You recollect when I shipped away for the States at Liverpool? When I got over the other side I went [illegible] see the folks. Of course they wanted me to be good and all that. Man, to please 'em I tried as we all do. But you might as well expect a leopard to sit and lick himself in the middle of a hen-farm. Even went as far as taking a job in my uncle's office—the old man's dead, you know.

"I had never known what hell was before. For those three months—yes, I stuck it out for three months—coming home o' nights like a hen-pecked husband, listening to the whole bunch lecturing me and telling me that I ought to get married and all that! Me!

"Well, then I took a flying jaunt up to li'l ole New York; just thought if I could get away from the home-town I'd feel better for a bit. You know. Then in a hop-joint down the Bowery I fell across a guy who had been in our bunch—oh, away after our time.

"Of course we got to yarning, and he came out with a yarn that set me by the ears. You remember the lie of the mountains at the back of Inyanga—the Mountains of the Mist, as Rider Haggard called 'em; the watershed of the Pungwe and the border? Well, according to him he deserted with a bunch of others from D Troop from Inyanga and bolted over the range into Portuguese country with the idea of cutting the rail the other side of Umtali and getting to Beira and a boat.

"But it appears that they were a pretty tenderfoot bunch and got lost in the dense forest. Their horses sickened as they would with tsetse fly, and they bumped up against a crowd of natives who nearly wiped 'em out.

"After wandering in the jungle for several days they climbed a bit of a hill, determined to seek shelter at the nearest *kraal* for the sake of food. Then, this fellow told me, he saw or thought he saw sticking out of the forest at what seemed about five miles away, a city of houses white in the sun. He says he began to cry, thinking he'd gone loony. Anyway the other fellows had got 'em too, for they saw the same thing."

"What!" I interrupted. "A city of houses near the source of the Pungwe! For Heaven's sake, you haven't come all this way to follow a pipe-dream like that, Billy! You said you met the man in a hop-joint. Why, Umtali's the nearest; and that must be several hundred."

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"Shut your head, old buck," retorted Billy. "Anyway these fellows just naturally made a straight line as far as possible for this extraordinary city. They plunged on, weak as they were, all day; but down in the forest of course they couldn't see anything except trees.

"Just as they were beginning to doubt each other and think that the whole thing was some form of mirage they were surrounded by some fifty natives—big fellows, the man said—armed with spears and blunderbuses and Belgian Sniders, although some of them had modern rifles—Mannlichers.

"They were too done to think of putting up a fight and were too glad to have a chance for some food. What dialect the natives spoke he didn't know, for not one of the bunch knew more than a few words of kitchen-Kaffir. Anyway they were marched off to a *kraal* near by, a well-kept and heavily barricaded village, according to what he said, put in a well-built hut and given food. Of course there was a lot of *indaba* which none of the fellows could understand. Anyway after being bucked up by food they began to sit up and take more notice.

"First of all they decided that the city they had seen was undoubtedly a mirage, or rocks shining in the sun; secondly they noticed that some chiefs, who came as if to view them, wore gold bangles—no, not like this one," interposed Billy, touching the one on his arm.

"That just got most of them going, as it were. Gold must be there. But they were prisoners and disarmed, and anyway as they had seen they would never be able to put up anything of a scrap, much less raid anybody. So they began to figure out how they could make a getaway and get up a real expedition.

"But that little plan was mighty soon hit on the head. There seemed to be a lot of excitement in the village that day, and the next morning at daybreak they were taken out and led off down a Kaffir path through the forest. Of course where they were going they hadn't the faintest idea, but go they had to.

"About eleven, according to this chap, he was plowing along, feeling sick and suffering from sore feet, when the man in front of him literally yelped. He looked up; and there, sparkling in the sun, through a break in the forest high on a *kopje* was the walled city of houses they had seen before, and all about it was terrace upon terrace of—gardens, he called 'em."

"What!" I expostulated. "D'you mean to say one of the old Phœnician cities?"

"Yessir!" asserted Billy. "Of course when this fellow let this out down in that Bowery joint I thought, too, it was a hop-dream, but what shook me up was this fact: How the —— could he have imagined a Phœnician city or ruins so near the Inyanga district where I knew such ruins are, if he hadn't been there?"

"That's true, but—well, where's this fellow now?"

"In New York for all I know or care. He was a flabby-kneed creature anyway, and the hop had got him; but all the same a million dollars wouldn't bring him back here."

"But why——"

"I'm telling you. They brought the bunch of them into the town; and a town it was with regular streets and real houses full of blacks—of course—holding markets and the Lord knows what. There they were put into another prison built of stones fashioned like bricks—remember those ruins around Motokos? They were given more food and left alone. Of course they were in a worse pickle than ever; not only that, but they were sort of fuddled with the whole thing. He told me that he had a queer sensation as if he weren't alive or was somehow living several centuries ago. All they could do naturally was to talk and wait.

"FOR three days, bar the blacks who brought them food, they saw no one. Then on the fourth they were taken out and led up the hill—I told you it was like a medieval castle on a *kopje*, didn't I?—up the hill to a kind of fortress as he described it.

"The six of 'em were placed in a row with a guard of blacks who carried enormous spears like halberds and dressed in leopard-skins. They reckoned that they must be the king's guard.

"While they were kept like that a gang came out from a high door to inspect them, and what surprized 'em was that these fellows, evidently chiefs or something like that, were not black but an olive-bronze color with hawk noses and thin lips more like Arabs; and they were dressed in white

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robes not quite in the Arabian fashion, because each wore a kind of tunic or toga and on their wrists were gold bangles chased; yes, like mine.

"They came over, sat in front of the prisoners on stools carved with a similar design to the one I showed you a while ago and inlaid with gold, and began to discuss something among themselves in a language which my man says he suspected from the first was not a native lingo. Then an elderly fellow with a white beard and melancholy eyes leaned forward a little and shook 'em up by demanding in English but with a strong accent—

" 'What do you seek in this country?'

"Apparently they all answered at once. The old man held up his hand.

" 'Your chief, if you please?'

"One of the bunch who had been a sergeant, a cockney, said—

" 'We lorst ourselves.'

" 'But what were you seeking when you lost yourselves?' the elder asked.

" 'We was trying to get out to Beira, mister. We was in the police over there,' said the sergeant, and jerked a thumb vaguely, 'and we were fed up and wanted to go 'ome.'

"The chiefs listened to a translation of this and seemed mighty puzzled. Then while they were still chewing the fat a small procession came out of the big door. A man was sitting on a kind of wooden *machilla* (hammock). He was dressed up, so my man described him, like a Roman general with a gold helmet on his head. But it wasn't Roman," Billy interrupted himself, "because I made him make a rough sketch of it. More like an Etruscan form or Phœnician, if you know the difference."

"I don't," said I impatiently. "But go on."

"Well, this fellow they reckoned was the king. He sat down in the middle of the elders. Then a little fellow—his features were slightly different to the others; more Jewish, he said—asked them in English—again with an accent—what they wanted. They tried to explain; but apparently he didn't want to listen to anything they had to say, for he began talking rapidly to the others. Several seemed as if they didn't agree, but finally the Jewish guy turned to them and said quickly:

" 'We're not going to keel you now but you can nevaire get out. You un'erstan'?'

" 'Good ——, what d'you mean?' broke in one of the party. 'You mean we're prisoners? What for?'

" 'You can't do it! Daren't do it!' the others hollered. 'The British government—'

" 'The Breteesh government will not do anyzing because God do not weesh,' the man announced. 'That ees all.'

"He sent 'em back with a wave of the hand, and they were herded back into their jail, kicking, but in a —— of a scare. They decided that the man was plumb crazy and talked all night wondering what was meant. In the morning they were surprized to be taken to a larger house with lots of gardens formed of the terraces—recollect the Inyanga ones?—and given more food and wine than they could eat or drink; even whisky, cigarets and cigars. They had nothing to do. The only thing was that they couldn't get out; were closely guarded by these big blacks with halberd spears day and night. They had nothing to do but eat and drink and smoke their heads off; but of information as to what was intended they couldn't get a word.

"They were forever making plans to escape even though the life seemed soft enough.

"For some months nothing happened. With no exercise—just lounging about and well fed—they began to get fat and lazy; that and the climate. Then one day the cockney sergeant disappeared. The last they had seen of him he had been in the garden smoking. They never saw or heard of him again. As a matter of fact they scarcely saw anybody save the black guards. Well, that happenstance scared 'em some.

"My man says he was there for about two years—and during that time two others disappeared. Then they became desperate and made a frantic stab at getting away. They got caught. But instead of being punished they were isolated in different houses. He says he began to think that he was going crazy, but within a few months he succeeded in beating it."

"But how?"

"A woman helped him. He must have been good-looking before the hop got him."

"But what did it all mean? Who are the priests and king people if they're not native negroes?"

"He never knew. Couldn't speak the lingo, remember; or even if he did learn it he never saw anybody but the guards and

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negro folk. That's just what I was determined to find out. I wanted him to come back; but as I said, he wouldn't for a million.

"Of course that yarn got me. Talked my head off to my uncle. Didn't dare tell him such a hop-dream, you bet! Said I was no good anyway, and if he'd advance me some few bucks on what would come to me on my mother's death I'd promise to disappear for keeps. For once he agreed with me.

"I'm supposed to be rubber-planting. Of course I made straight for here. I managed to dig out various rumors of strange things up-country and found a partner—Harvey, an Englishman; an awful son of a gun, but of course I didn't know that until after we had left Umtali. Then he developed an idea that he was running the outfit—you know the type, Faxy."

"I do," said I feelingly. Well I knew how different a man may be in town from what the wilds bring out.

Billy laughed and slid off the bed.

"Just to whet your appetite, old buck," he remarked, dragging out a steel uniform-case beneath the bed.

He opened it and held up what appeared to be an ampulla or flask, made of gold. As I exclaimed in astonished admiration the electric light failed. I heard an exclamation from Billy; and as I rose, thinking something about a short circuit, I saw dark forms in the window. Then a blow put me out.

WHEN I came to I was blinking at the stars being washed out by the dawn, and a million mosquitoes were chewing my face. As recollection came back I sat up, wondering how on earth I had got there and where I was, and conscious of a sore head.

And Billy? Vague recollections of the strange story he had been telling me returned. Good Lord, I thought, what could have happened? Robbery? I felt my pockets. No.

I got up and looked around. Evidently I was somewhere on the outskirts of the town, for a stretch of swamp and sand was in front of me and low adobe sort of houses at the back. I hastened along and after some trouble in locating it found the hotel.

As I paused to be certain which was Billy's room the proprietor came out. I inquired for Senhor Langster's room. The man appeared puzzled. He did not know the gentleman, he explained.

"But yes," said I, "a *senhor Americão*," and described Billy as well as I could, adding that I had dined with him on the previous night.

Very unctuously the *patron* informed me that there were two German *senhors*, one French *senhor* and three Portuguese *senhores*, but most certainly no English or American. Irritated, I pointed out the room, judging by the recollection of the windows from the street.

"The room is empty," he explained; "but if the *senhor* insists——"

He led me up and opened the door. It *was* Billy's room; but the bed was uncreased and there was no sign of our drinks and cheroots; spotlessly clean—that is, for a Portuguese room. I was flabbergasted. I followed him mutely.

"The *senhor* is satisfied?"

Staring at him, I was taken by another idea.

"But where's *my* room? I took a room here last night."

The *patron* regretted exceedingly that he had never had the honor of seeing the *senhor* before.

"Oh my ——!" said I, holding my throbbing head. "I don't exist either!"

"But if the *senhor* requires a room——?"

"No; a cognac. That is," I added dismally, sinking into a chair on the patio, "if I don't melt into thin air before you come back."

III

WHEN my physical head as well as my mental felt a little clearer I gave up wondering and began to try to piece matters together. I had difficulty at first when recalling Billy's yarn to realize whether he really had told that queer story or not. It was only by going back and linking up incidents from the time when I had stepped ashore with the mad Scot to my meeting Billy, dining and listening to the yarn up to the point when Billy had held up the golden ampulla that I convinced myself that it was really true.

First of all I asked myself what had become of him and why? Had he been killed or kidnaped? How had he been able to live in this mysterious city and come out alive?

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Whatever had happened I saw that the greasy proprietor of the hotel was in league with the assaulters. From him alone could I possibly get any information. I decided that I would interview the gentleman, and at the end of a gun. But obviously I couldn't do that in the open.

I called him up and informed him that I had changed my mind and would take a room. He spread out his fat hands and professed to be delighted to honor the *senhor*. I rose, bidding him to show me to the room. He led me as far as the door and then called a servant. The cunning little man had evidently foreseen my move. I couldn't object, but decided to wait my chance.

I sat on the very bed Billy had sat upon and tried anew to solve the problem. It would be utterly useless, I knew, to go to either the British consul or even the American had there been one. I had not a shred of evidence in view of the fact that the proprietor and evidently his staff would deny all knowledge of Billy.

After I had bathed my head, which was not badly cut, I went down for breakfast. Diaz, as I learned his name was, was still mouching about the dining-room. As I drank my coffee I watched him. He appeared perfectly unconcerned, exhibiting none of the furtive looks and grimaces such as villains are usually supposed to make.

I got into conversation with him. Obviously from what I had heard of Billy's story the Matakini had something to do with it, although Billy had not mentioned him as far as he had gone except in opening the subject when he had remarked that he had "got even" with the Matakini.

I chattered about Beira and asked questions that a traveler would ask, and then suddenly inquired whether he knew the Matakini. Not a flicker of an eyelid was there as he affected astonishment, inquiring whether the *senhor* was pleased to joke about chigger fleas. I explained that I meant a man, but the test had failed. Quite possibly, I reflected, the Matakini was known in these parts, if known at all, under some other name.

I decided to wander around the town and tried to pick up a clue. After rescuing my bag from the customs I hired a trolley such as they push on rails in Beira about the sandy streets and set out on a tour.

I spent most of the morning sampling various bars before I found anybody who seemed likely, and that was a bullet-headed Irishman who ran a liquor-dive. He seemed as friendly as an Irish terrier and rather glad to chat with me.

Once he got going, he became fairly voluble, and from him I began to learn something about the manners and customs of Beira. Only six or seven weeks ago, according to his loquacious account, the governor of the province, his Excellency O Capitão-Gerale Dom Porfirio Fernandez Diaz—who was not related, I learned, to my innkeeper—had been held up by three Englishmen in his private train as he was returning from up-country with native taxes in gold. He was compelled at the point of the revolvers actually to escort the desperadoes on board a private yacht in which two of them had come. Since then foreigners had not been popular with the said Excellency.

I rather suspected that my host's Celtic imagination ran away a bit; nevertheless I guessed that there must be some truth in the yarn, which seemed to amuse him vastly. Finally I decided to confide in him, not giving away poor Billy's strange story, of course. I merely explained that whilst talking to this friend we had been attacked and described what had happened since that point.

O'Grath, as he had introduced himself, seemed to imagine that this was another joke, but he could give me little information or encouragement. Such things in Beira were not judged to be of a hair-raising vintage. As I had supposed, he said that if I went to the governor I would get little attention or none at all, particularly as I was of the same nationality as the gentlemen of the yacht who had so wounded the Capitão-Gerale's good temper, dignity and private purse.

However, I did strike something when I inquired whether he knew or had ever heard of the Matakini. At first he could not recollect the sobriquet, but after I had described him he did. A trader he was supposed to be who came from up-country somewhere. Little was known about him except that he was considered dangerous to monkey with. He was reported to have made a pile in ivory, and consequently had the means to gain the good-will with the governor and officials.

I asked O'Grath where this individual

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came from, but that he did not know except that he got off the line from Beira to Umtali in Rhodesia near the border at a station called Manzini. I made a note of the name and strolled back to my hotel with the object of interviewing friend Diaz the lesser, but he was not to be seen; and when I inquired for him I was informed that the *patron* had been called away on urgent business; up the line, they said, but I had good reason not to believe them.

I SAT down and got my brainbox going again. That Billy had been murdered I did not think—in spite of the presence of the golden ampulla. The murderers might have been assistants of the greasy innkeeper. Such things have often occurred before. But then why hadn't they murdered me?

There seemed far more at the back of the whole situation than I considered, probably influenced by Billy's extraordinary yarn. Who and what were this mysterious city and the non-negroid priests or rulers, from whom evidently the ampulla had come as well as the bracelets?

I calculated the financial side. On me I had scarcely five pounds; but I had the draft on Durban for a few hundred with which I had originally intended to hunt for possibilities in Rhodesia. Now I could have the draft transferred from Durban of course; but if I bought equipment and started up the line from Beira in search of the mysterious city and Billy something would be likely to happen swiftly and violently, as undoubtedly I would be watched by those who had been responsible for Billy's disappearance.

I decided to transfer the money to Delagoa Bay, go there and thence up the line through Rhodesia to Umtali, the place which I recollected Billy had said he had started from. But neither a mail-boat nor any other form of locomotion runs from Beira every day. I had to hang around three days before a tramp bound for Delagoa turned up.

However, during that time my precious greasy host of the inn did not show up; and I spent most of my time with the Irishman O'Grath. From him I got a bit of information which taught me that I wouldn't make a good *Sherlock Holmes*. A point which I had utterly forgotten to inquire about, and which he revealed in a casual remark while talking about the Matakini, was to the effect that he had heard that the Matakini had been in Beira about four days ago, down from up-country for provisions. That, thought I, settles the fact that the Matakini is at the bottom of the mystery; therefore to find Billy I must hunt the Chigger.

I could not find any likely partner whom I knew in view of general experience and Billy's hinted troubles with the man Harvey, so I decided to play a lone hand. A month later I set out from Umtali, intending to follow Billy as far as I could, heading for the head-waters of the Pungwe. As far as the Rhodesian border the trail was fairly easy; but fifteen miles within what was nominally Portuguese territory I lost trace of his passage and began to get in touch with tribes who were little acquainted with the white man and his ways, although they were friendly enough and eager to trade.

I had—wisely, I thought—not made any definite plan, deciding to wait until I got to the river, as the old adage says, before trying to cross it. My equipment was small—necessarily; and anyway as I knew from experience the bigger the caravan, unless heavily armed, the more the temptation to attack and loot it; also the more difficulty in traversing strange country to obtain porters either to go or fresh men there. I had only ten *pagazi* and two servants, one officially a gun-bearer—a retinue not large enough to attract undue attention.

Of Portuguese interference twenty miles from the rail I had no fear whatever. Occasionally the Portuguese made futile attempts to collect hut tax, but in the interior on the few occasions when they had sent a punitive expedition they had suffered repulses, in one case having practically the whole force annihilated. The whole of the upper regions of Portuguese East Africa north of the rail to the one-time German border was to all intents and purposes unknown territory; hence the Billy story, or rather the suggestion of Billy's unfinished story, was feasible—at least insofar as some unknown tribe's actually being there.

Ten days out I came to the village of a chief who was of sufficient importance and power to make it necessary to have his permission to enter his country. Fortunately I am fair, a trait which has helped me quite a lot with the natives in this region, to whom a Portuguese for very sound reasons

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is anathema. Since leaving Umtali this village was the first one I remarked as being really fortified; that is, it had a well-constructed stockade around it, indicating not a people who were timorous but a warlike tribe surrounded by other warlike tribes among whom there were, as is frequently the case, continual forays and raids.

The chief was a middle-aged man who seemed inclined to be suspicious as well as greedy. The *indaba* lasted several days, he continually making excuses to prolong my stay.

Although I made discreet inquiries as to whether Billy had passed through I could not gain any hint that pointed to him in particular until I saw by accident one of the chief's brothers sporting a Martini rifle. Now the Portuguese and most traders in their territory use either the Snider or some other make of gun. Such trade goods too as they had were, I knew, of Portuguese origin. As I knew that Billy had started from Umtali I took it as fairly certain that the gun had come from him, so that I became more anxious than ever to continue on.

On the morning of the fifth day I was summoned by a young warrior for an audience with the chief, whom I found in the usual clubhouse in the center of the village squatting with his elders and witch-doctors. As soon as I was seated on the campstool carried for me by my bearer I noticed—for you have to make it your business to remark such things apparently trivial, on which nevertheless your life may depend—that among them was a stranger, a youngish man to whom was paid in the native manner much deference. Upon his forearm was a gold bangle, the sight of which quickened my hopes considerably.

The *indaba* had been delayed, I thought, in order to summon him. From the fact that he was not of the same tribe, as was revealed by the difference in the form of hair-dressing and the tribal cicatrices, I gathered that these people must be subject to another tribe. This man carried too, I noticed, a Service rifle of the pattern with which the Rhodesian Mounted Police are armed, another point which made me sure that I was on the right track; for I figured that more than probably he must have been one of the chiefs who had captured and disarmed the party of six deserters from Inyanga.

After the customary beating about the bush a prohibitive price for powerful magic was demanded on the ground that the evil spirits which were with me would be difficult to exorcise. I made the correct answer, and, smiling as if I were tickled to death, retired to consider what I should do. The amount—in goods of course—was ridiculous; and moreover I saw that should I give way on that point others would immediately arise.

When I reached my camp I found unmistakable symptoms of real trouble brewing. There were no women and children squatting around for what they could pick up in the way of valuable old sardine-tins or legitimate trade.

I had lunch in the open before my tent and tried to find a way out of the tangle. Perhaps, influenced or ordered by the strange chief, they were about to attempt to disarm me or possibly murder me out of hand. But the latter I did not think was likely; rather it seemed to me that the former was the more probable course, as it was what the other natives had done with the police-party. But I certainly had no desire to enter the secret city as a prisoner to be tortured or massacred.

THROUGHOUT the day nobody from the village came near us. My twelve men were squatting around their temporary grass shelters, evidently discussing important news. From the look of them I began to think that they had got wind of something and might desert me at any moment—at any rate the ten porters.

I called up Magunga, my head boy and servant, and asked him what the porters were talking about. He said they were commenting on the absence of women and children and added that the chief was angry with their white men who, from remarks overheard of the villagers, had offended against some tabu. I knew what that meant—the usual excuse to justify themselves, sought by whites as well as blacks when about to do something particularly evil.

I realized that I had to act, and that quickly. If I made the slightest sign of striking camp I was pretty sure that they'd hurry matters—probably rush me. On the morrow they certainly would. "When you are menaced by an enemy strike first," is a good motto; and I adopted it. I knew that I couldn't get far with my scheme; but at all

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events I might work out of this fix.

The sun was about an hour above the treetops when I went with Magunga, whom I did not tell of my plan, preceding me with a campstool, up to the entrance of the stockade and called out that I had come to give the chief my words in reply. I was apparently unarmed, though in reality I had two revolvers hidden beneath my coat. Several men came out of their huts fully armed, and grouped about me, watching curiously and chatting, but I couldn't follow what they said as I did not know their local dialect well enough.

I appeared as unconcerned as possible as I awaited the messenger, who presently returned and bade me to follow him. To my delight this time I found the chief squatting beneath a tree in front of his house with the stranger alone with him.

After the usual preliminaries I told them that I was a top-side number-one white man who was both a hunter and a magician; that I had just consulted my private oracle, who had informed me just what sort of blackguard he was; that because of that I wouldn't stay in his beastly country if he paid me—or words to that effect; that I intended to leave his village on the morrow at the hour of the monkey, or cock-crow; and added that he would give himself the pleasure to pass the night with me and escort me personally and alone toward the border for one day's long march. This—to him—extraordinary statement finally penetrated into his head and raised a guttural cluck of astonishment. While I was warning him that any resistance would mean certain death, I shifted suddenly to get my back to the hut wall in case any of his people were peeping through the reed fence, and whipped out both revolvers.

Instantly the young stranger grabbed for his spear. I fired, deliberately breaking the haft above the spot where he had clutched it. He grunted and remained still.

I heard cries and yells coming from the village. I told the chief to shout instructions to keep away or I would blow his head off. He did it somewhat hurriedly. Further I instructed him to inform his people that he would walk in front of me through the village to my camp and that if any one attempted to attack both chiefs would drop dead.

Through the crowd of excited warriors brandishing spears and guns my two prisoners marched ahead with Magunga immediately behind me. At the gate I made my man warn them that they must not come within one hundred paces of my camp. He did so.

In the tent I tied the pair to the tent-pole with straps, sat on the bed with the revolvers on the little camp table facing them, told Magunga to do continuous sentry-go around the camp and to warn me if anybody approached, ordered the other boy to make much tea and light the lantern, and with cigarets prepared to pass the night.

To while away the time I attempted to get my prisoners to talk. The local chief, who was in an obvious funk, immediately began to lay the blame upon the other fellow, whom, he pleaded, he was bound to obey; but the stranger, even when menaced with the revolver within a few inches of his head, would not open his mouth, exhibiting not the slightest sign of cowardice.

From the village I could hear the hubbub going on all night. Some of them came close to my camp in the darkness in spite of their fear of evil spirits; mostly, I think, expecting to see some terrible demons prancing about the white magician's camp; but no one attempted to attack. At dawn I prepared to march.

As my men were striking camp I noticed that the hubbub among the villagers, which had increased at the signs of moving, had died down. With my two chiefs walking in front as security I started off.

About a couple of hundred yards from the village the back trail led through a narrow belt of swamp and forest. In the early light it was faint twilight at most in the shadow of the great trees heavily festooned with creepers, and the going was difficult, particularly for a white with boots on. The porters waded to their knees and sometimes to their waists in stinking black mud.

Scrambling with difficulty from fungoid root to root, I was compelled to stick my guns in my belt; but still there was no chance of either captive bolting, for before he could leap and scramble out of sight in the undergrowth I could easily have brought him down. In the very gloomiest portion just as I was balancing for a spring on to another root a voice shouted—

"Put your hands up or I weel shoot!"

I was so startled that I slipped and slid up to my waist in the ooze. Then I saw within

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five feet the muzzle of a rifle covering me and behind it a black-bearded, swarthy face beneath a ragged felt hat.

As I obeyed, the figure advanced from where he had been in hiding in the thicket, revealing a small man dressed like a native in loin-cloth and boots, a white man whose shoulders were burned almost black with the sun and upon whose hairy arm gleamed dully a gold bracelet.

IV

TAS, HOLDING the rifle at the hip with his finger on the trigger, the Matakini disarmed me for the second time I squirmed with rage. But nevertheless I thought swiftly. The first thing to know or guess was, did the man know me? I didn't flatter myself that he would recollect the young trooper on the Ruania; and anyway I had altered as he had. The question was rather, had he been present when Billy was kidnaped or murdered? And had he seen me in Billy's company? If he had then surely he would know instantly what I was after. I decided to pretend that I did not know him from Cain.

I noticed as my late captives came up that they did not seem at all surprized; and, recollecting that the hubbub had ceased that morning as I was striking camp, I guessed that the Matakini must have arrived, quieted them and lain in ambush for me.

Perhaps after all the delay had been purposely made to give them time to send for the Matakini; at any rate he seemed to have, as had the strange chief, control over the others; for as the warriors came yelling triumphantly from all sides about us he shouted at them in the dialect that they were not to injure me.

"What d'you mean," said I as he turned to me; "you, a white man, taking sides with natives?"

"Go back to villeege. I talk with you zere. Go!"

He motioned with my own revolver, and I was compelled to obey.

On that short walk to the village I did some more industrious thinking. I began to be certain that the Matakini did not recollect ever having seen me before either in Rhodesia or Beira; therefore apparently he had not conducted Billy's disappearance in person. The point was, what did he intend to do with me now? Why really had he interfered?

There seemed to be, as the story of the police deserters intimated, a regularly organized system among the natives to keep all whites or strangers away. Why? Billy's uncompleted story of the mysterious city might be a feasible solution. I remembered too that those six deserters had been taken straight to the city and condemned to some mysterious fate from which only one escaped. I seemed likely to follow their example.

Surrounded by the warriors, who already were driving my unhappy *pagazi* and two headmen with my goods at the point of their spears, we arrived at the village amid much hubbub and noise. The Matakini, who had not spoken on the road, ordered me into a hut just within the stockade, and, squatting upon a chief's stool a native brought, he announced:

"Now I talk wit' you. What you want come here for? What you want shoot my frien' for? You tell me or I shoot you; you see?"

"In the first place," said I, sitting down with my back against the wall, "who the —— are you? And secondly, what d'you mean by holding me up? You're white, aren't you?"

He tapped the revolver-barrel with a finger.

"You no talk what I tell you, he talk; you see?"

"Yes; I see; but any fool can murder a defenseless man. You as a white owe me an explanation for taking the side of a native."

"You say what for you want shoot my frien'?"

"I had no intention of murdering your 'friend,' as you're pleased to call him. I was merely taking precautions to prevent his murdering me."

"He no want keel you. He want keep you till I come, you see."

"I see. But who the —— may you be?"

"That not your beesiness. You say what you come here for."

"Well, if you must know, I should say it's pretty obvious, isn't it? What else would a man come here for but to trade?"

The sharp black eyes watched me keenly. That he had not seen me in Beira was evident.

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"YOU have been in this country before?"

"Never. Rhodesia's my country."

"What you do in Rhodesia?"

"That's my beesiness," I retorted, mocking him.

"Ah! I know. You prospector. You want come here look for gold. You Breeteesh. Then you send soldier here. But there ees no gold here, you see."

"You mean," said I unwisely, "that what there is you want to keep yourself, eh?"

"Who told you gold here?"

"The fact of your presence is sufficient guarantee."

"That no come from here," he said, noticing my involuntary glance at his bangle. "That come from Cypre. I Cypre man. I leef here twenty year. This my country. I no want other people come my country; you see?"

"You mean you're chief of these tribes; is that it?"

"I no chief. I *padrio.*"

"*Padrio?* What d'you mean? That there's a monastery here?"

"Monastery, yes. Big monastery, but not what you b'lieve."

"What? Do you mean some form of the Ethiopian Church?"

"Much more old than Ethiopian Church."

"What? Some ancient Phœnician religion? Is there a Phœnician city there?" I exclaimed, forgetting my situation in my interest.

"Who tell you city there?" he demanded instantly.

"No one told me," I lied. "Aren't there tons of old Phœnician ruins over the other side of Inyanga there?"

"Inyanga! You been Inyanga?"

He peered at me intently and then laughed.

"Ah, it ees my leetle frien' who want take me for police at Motokos; *hein?* Ha-ha-ha! How you do again? What you do all time? You catch bad mans, yes? When I see you I t'ink all time where I seen that funnee face."

"That'll do," said I wrathfully. "I'll get even——"

"You forget my leetle frien'; you see?" he reminded me, tapping the revolver-barrel. "You want talk wi' him, yes?"

"Well, what d'you intend to do with me?" I demanded.

"What I do wit' ev'rybody come my country."

"You didn't with one anyway," said I angrily.

"Ah, you mean the other leetle infant whose boots I take, yes? You seen him then at Beira? They tell me he talk too much—you frien', yes. I know ev'ryt'ing, you see."

"I know a good deal too, Matakini."

"No matter eef you know somet'ing or you know not'ing. You come 'long me jus' same. I jus' keel you how I want, you see."

"That's awfully nice of you."

"Yes. One man of you frien's from Inyanga he get away; he tell your leetle frien's wit'out boots. No man leave who come here."

"But he did. Is he still alive?"

"Yes, he leeve all right; but he sure want to be dead; you see."

"You swine!" I exclaimed, half-rising. "You're torturing——"

"Seet down!" snapped the Matakini, pointing the revolver.

I paused half-way. If the maniac really intended to torture me to death as he implied I might as well force the issue now by rushing him. If he didn't "out" me right away I thought I could get my hands upon the little brute and then I would be confident of the result even before his people could rescue him; if not, then a quick death.

But then the thought of Billy being alive and being tortured intervened. I had to make an effort. God knew what might happen. I couldn't foresee any way out then. I sat back slowly.

"You may go to hell-hull-an'-halifax," said I slowly, "and do your darnedest. You've got the drop on me for the second time; but for the third look out the cards don't fall my way a bit."

"No fall your way," said the Matakini. "I make leetle meestake sometime when I 'low you 'scape on Ruania and your frien'. All right, I pay. But I no make meestake 'nother time; you see. Now you stop t'ink what I tell you so you find me funnee mad, yes? I send you food, yes; plenty food make you nice and fat; you see. Ha-ha!"

After handing me over to the care of two buck natives—big fellows of the stranger tribe, both armed with modern rifles—the Matakini bowed ironically and left me to my own reflections.

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ONCE more I tried to piece together the various points I had learned from Billy's decapitated story and the remarks of the Matakini. As far as I could make out now the city of Phœnician or other origin must really be existent; and apparently it harbored an organization that might be an African secret society based on superstition, like the Human Leopard Society of the West Coast, or, as the Matakini seemed to imply, some other religious system with an order of priests of which he said he was one. Also for some reason they—probably through this superstitious religious order—had complete control over the surrounding tribes and were determined to keep out the white world at any cost. I guessed from the Matakini's remark that Billy, who had apparently somehow won immunity from the usual penalty of death or slavery, had offended against the sacred tabu and had been kidnaped and brought back to be tortured. Beyond that of course I couldn't make head or tail of the affair.

Some young girls brought me, as the Matakini had promised, an ample supply of chicken and goat and milk, to which was generously added some of my own canned food. During the afternoon I could hear the hum of a big *indaba* going on in the clubhouse; but nobody came near me until about four, when a messenger brought orders to my guard, who told me to follow them. They led me through the stockade, where to my amazement I found a *machilla* hammock, into which I was bidden to mount.

The Matakini must be insane, I began to think, thus to treat one who to him was obviously a dangerous prisoner. It did occur to me that possibly he was doing so in order to keep up the prestige of a white in the eyes of the natives; yet it could scarcely be that, judging by his own ways and his native manner of dressing. My bearers went off at the usual fast lope of a well-trained *machilla* team, and my two guards ambled on either side of me. Of the Matakini I saw no sign, nor did I on the whole trip.

That night I was placed in a better built hut in a larger village, which I thought belonged to the younger of the two chiefs whom I had taken captive—the one with the gold bangle. At any rate he was there, and even looked into my hut to greet me most politely. The local people showed no signs at all of hostility; merely the usual mild curiosity.

I don't think that I even planned to attempt to escape. They certainly did not give me a shadow of a chance. Their system among the tribes of barring out any stranger seemed pretty well organized; and anyway I might as well travel in luxury at the Matakini's expense. Perhaps after all he had some idea of a grim joke. Time enough when I got to the city and in communication with Billy.

We traveled fairly fast and long for two days, passing through a thickly populated district of a tribe which was obviously strong and warlike. Then on the morning of the third as I swung out of a fairly thick forest I, in spite of the fact that I had been forewarned, almost thought that I had gone loony as Billy's man in the opium-den in New York had done.

There at the head of a broad and fertile valley through which meandered a river, upon a *kopje*, surrounded by others wooded and boulder-strewn just as they are in Mashonaland, was undoubtedly a walled town whose flat-topped houses, dominated by a great square building evidently in the center, rose in tiers above crenelated walls, the whole white in the fierce sun against the mass of foot-hills of the Inyanga range of mountains.

As we swung down a well-beaten trail I noticed that the land was well cultivated down the valley; and in the open marshes large herds of cattle of the Madagascar kind with the hump were grazing. I forgot that I was under sentence of death—and a sticky one too if the Matakini was not jesting—in the excitement at having reached this mysterious city.

Between the silt of the valley and the walls was terrace upon terrace filled with plants and what appeared to be orange and olive trees. Figures were moving about the large arch of the principal gate, reached by a broad stair carved out of the granite hillside. As my bearers walked up these steps I saw that on each side of the gate, built of blocks of granite, were figures, carven with considerable skill, which appeared to be winged bulls.

The gates were enormous. They appeared to be made of planks of ivory yellow with age which were covered entirely with hieroglyphics and weird animals and cones. Immediately within was what I took to be the market-place such as they have in Oriental cities, the floor of which was of solid

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rock. There were no horses or vehicles of any kind. As I was staring round I noticed the sound of the trickle of running water and wondered where it came from.

Not many natives were about. The women and men seemed to be of the same tribe as that through which we had traveled the last two days.

At the end of this square between the walls of flat-topped houses a wide street ran straight up the rocky hill, with flights of steps wherever the path became very steep, to the great square building which I had seen without dominating the whole town, decorated with more winged animals like gigantic gargoyles.

Half-way up my escort turned into a side street flanked by high walls broken at wide distances by the blank backs of houses. Coming toward us was a procession containing what turned out to be a kind of cross between a sedan chair and a hammock. In this conveyance lounged or were seated a man and a woman. They looked for all the world like a scene in a movie; for the man had a kind of Roman toga on and was certainly a white man—fair, too.

Next to him was a woman in a kind of blanket wrapped about her obviously in the Greek manner. Her hair was black and long, and she was swarthy; but not more so than many Italian girls I've seen in Bleecker Street, New York, or Soho, London. As a matter of fact I was so engrossed in looking at her that not until we were almost abreast did I see the man's face.

"Billy!" I yelled and tried to leap out of my hammock.

One of my guards roughly hurled me back, but I shouted again. The woman was staring at me, and Billy turned too and deliberately looked me straight in the face without a glimmer of recognition.

At some order from my guard the bearers broke into a run and I was carried past them. I was so flabbergasted that I couldn't think. I sat peering out of the *machilla* at the back of Billy's fair head.

A bit farther along they took me into a house. Inside was a kind of bare hall. I was told to get out of the hammock and then, still in a maze, was led into a room on the right and a heavy wooden door was slammed and bolted upon me. Vaguely aware that there was a pallet in a corner on the floor, I sat on it, staring stupidly at a barred window high up near the roof.

Was he Billy? I was dead certain he was. But the Matakini had given me to understand that he was being tortured. Tortured! With a pretty girl doing a kind of movie Roman-emperor stunt and didn't know me? He *must* have known me. Of course he must! Why? What did it mean?

V

I FELT as bewildered and unreal as I did after the crack on the head in Beira and the denial of Billy's existence. Half a dozen wild surmises came up, but none that was tenable. Billy had been hypnotized; he had been tortured until he had gone mad; he had submitted to whatever demands the Matakini had made regarding my sticky end; or he had totally forgotten me.

That Billy should willingly desert me in any rational state of mind was incredible. Yet I felt myself grabbing as it were at reality with an uneasy sense that anything might be possible, granting that such a phenomenon as this extraordinary city did exist.

I gave up trying to solve the problem and made an examination of my prison. The walls were bare and made of stone dressed in brick-shape. The window was high up and heavily barred. The door was solidly made of some very hard African wood. The lock I could not make out from the inside.

The pallet or divan in the corner was made of some kind of woven material of a pattern I had never seen before and was well stuffed—I opened it to see—with dried moss of some kind. The walls, which were apparently extremely thick, and the gloom made the place quite comfortably cool even in the early afternoon. All was quiet save for the sound of trickling water such as I had heard on entering the city. What it was I could not imagine.

Like a caged beast I began to pace up and down the room, which was fairly large, vague ideas and plans fomenting me into a state of excitement. Presently the door creaked and opened, and the stranger chief with the flat gold bangle who had been once my captive came in unattended, greeted me and squatted down as if for an *indaba*.

After the usual form of polite inquiries,

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more after the Arabic manner with this man than in the ordinary native way, he informed me that he was deputed to be my guardian and to see to my needs. This statement didn't seem at all interesting to me.

However, I recollected that when we had entered the gate my servants and porters with my goods had disappeared. I asked where they were. He told me that they were all dead, having been slaughtered immediately we had arrived. When I angrily wished to know why he said that that was the law according to the chiefs.

"What chiefs?" I demanded. "The Matakini? The man who rescued thee?"

"Nay, he is the first doctor" (using the word indicating magician).

"Who is the chief then?"

"That is but known to the Great Ones."

"Who art thou?"

"I am the son of Banfangala, chief of the children of Banfangala."

"Who are the Great Ones of whom thou dost speak?"

"That is known only by Those Who Have Eaten of the Fruit" (of initiation).

As I knew a little of the cults within cults among all secret societies, mystic or religious, I tried another tack.

"O son of Banfangala, who is the white man whom we met before we entered this house?"

"I saw no white man, for I was not with thee."

"He was a man fairer than I," I explained, recollecting that the man had disappeared somewhere between sighting the city and the house; exactly where or how I had been too interested to notice, "and wears upon his left arm a bracelet like unto thine, yet having certain marks upon it."

"He was of Those."

I controlled my irritation and said—

"I wish to see him."

"Thou wilt see him when the time is ripe."

After that I gave up, knowing I would not get any information even of the little, as I suspected, that he knew.

"What callest thou the man who rescued thee?"

"The lord of the Temple Altar."

I could hardly repress a smile, thinking of the difference in this pompous title and that bestowed upon him by whites in Rhodesia—the chigger flea!

"And how is named the fair man of whom I spake?"

"The Seeker of Secrets."

Billy the seeker of secrets! It seemed more confusing than ever.

"What would the One Bidden to the Feast require?" demanded the son of Banfangala, for native-like he would never mention his own name.

"The One Bidden to the Feast?" I repeated, bewildered; and then, realizing, as there was obviously no one else present, that this must be the name they had given me, I replied, "My private things (goods belonging to the body) that I may wash in the manner of my kind; water and food."

"These things shalt thou have," he answered and, rising, left me.

The acceptance of my wish gave me a ray of hope. For the *veld* I prefer a Colt or Webley, as they are not so likely to get clogged with dust and damp as the more intricate mechanism of an automatic; and in my steel suit-case I had placed an automatic with cartridges which I had quite forgotten until that moment. Would they break open the case and search?

I SOON had my answer. The gods were good for once or my luck seemed changing, for the suit-case was unopened and my automatic quite safe; also I found a couple of sticks of dynamite with fuse and detonators, which like most prospectors I had always with me. I told the man who appeared with it that I wanted water. He bade me to follow him. Under pretext of taking out clean underwear, razors, etc., and hidden by the box-lid, I slipped the automatic and the dynamite into my pockets. He led me through the hall-like place and into an open courtyard with a square pool of water in the center and flanked by closed doors after the style of the Roman *atria*.

I stripped and began a badly needed wash. As I was wondering why the water was so cool and fresh I noticed that at the bottom was an inlet and outlet. Probably, thought I, the pool was kept replenished from some reservoir. After a shave in my cell and a smoke—another prize from my suit-case—I became much more optimistic, particularly with the reassuring feel of the bulge in my pocket.

I carefully went over everything I had been told by Billy, the Matakini and the son of Banfangala to compare notes and try to arrive at some feasible solution. But,

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twist the evidence about as I would, nothing satisfactory in the shape of even a theory could I evolve.

I prowled around the room, but failed to discover any hope of getting out unaided. There was only one alternative—to hold up my jailer when he came in and chance whether he had companions outside. Of course the street door might be closed also. Anyway I decided to take the risk, and at night.

The latter idea was suggested by my pocket torch, which fortunately was still in my pocket. I had vague hopes that the torch might serve to scare any possible pursuers at night, when their superstitious minds would probably take it for the eye of a demon.

What I was going to do and where I was to go I hadn't the faintest idea, except to find some place to hide and eventually find Billy unless the old boy really had gone off his nut. Anyway the plan soothed me.

About sunset my jailer came with food. It was too light to make the attempt to escape, and the food looked good—roasted kid, bananas, fish, olives and wine in an ampulla, the replica in clay of the one Billy had shown me. Also the man brought in two lamps, shaped something like the Roman, with oil and a wick in the lip, and with tinder and steel lighted them. Again I wondered at the solicitude of the Matakini. After this splendid meal—for central Africa!—I smoked and matured my plans. Finally I decided to make the attempt after midnight well before I calculated the moon was due to rise.

When that hour had come I took my spare suit of breeches and coat and, cutting open the pallet, stuffed them with the dry moss so that in the dim light it would represent me to a casual glance as asleep on the divan. Then, standing behind the door, I began to moan and beat on the wood. I didn't want to yell loudly for fear of waking any possible sleepers, but as nothing happened I did so.

At last in between the yells I heard the faint patter of naked feet. The door opened. I did my best to do a ventriloquial act, saying that I was ill. The man, looking at the bed, advanced two steps, dragging his rifle-butt on the floor.

The opportunity was so good that I had no need to hold him up. With a spring I landed a full right just behind his left ear. I hurt my fist considerably, for no one's skull is so hard as a negro's; but he cushioned off the wall, which helped me; and before he could yell I got in another, which put him to sleep.

There were some braces in my suit-case; and with those I bound him, then gagged him with a shirt and dumped him on the divan. Naturally I didn't neglect to take along his rifle and ammunition.

I peeped into the hall, where one oil lamp was burning. The room was empty. In the *atrium* I could see the glimmer of the pool in the starlight.

I tried the street door and flashed my torch on the lock. There was an enormous key in it about the size of a large corkscrew. I tried various ways of working it, but the door would not open. I wasted some time in finding out that the lock was on the ratchet-bolt system and that you had to unwind by turning the key a number of times.

At last I got the door open and was in the street. I stole down toward the main-road with the flights of steps. Peering round the corner, I saw the yellow of dim light. At first I couldn't imagine what it could be until at length I made out that all the figures I had noticed decorating the temple or whatever the great building was, were illuminated—with the little oil lamps, I supposed—and I just could hear a distant sound as of chanting.

I paused to ponder which way I had better go. I could not see a soul about. Curiosity urged me to go up and investigate the temple and see what the singing was about; but prudence suggested otherwise. However, in the darkest side of the wall I began to venture up.

Half-way, just at the foot of a longer flight of steps than usual, I came across a door ajar. Peeping within, I could vaguely make out in the darkness a curious garden formed of terraces evidently cut in the granite and filled with soil.

I paused to listen. Only the distant chanting and the trickling of water could I hear.

I stepped inside a few paces. Behind a clump of trees I saw a faint light. I crept cautiously forward with the rifle under my arm, the automatic in one hand and the torch in the other. Hearing no other sounds, I advanced farther and peered through the branches.

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In the dim light of oil lamps I saw five women, nude and apparently oiled, kneeling in a posture of prayer before a wall of granite upon which was carved a figure of a winged bull such as I had remarked on the town gates. Then as I stared I made out a pile of some white objects upon a slab at the feet of the bas-relief. What they could be I couldn't guess, except that they were evidently offerings of some sort. As for the image, it was obviously the tribal god.

Then a twig on a branch which I had parted snapped under my hand. Instantly the five leaped to their feet like startled antelope. I remained motionless. Whether or no the starlight was reflected on the barrel of the gun or automatic I don't know, but one began to walk toward me.

POKING the torch through the screen of branches, I switched it full into her face. She stopped. For an instant there was the hiss of inhaling breath. Then the five turned and fled, uttering appalling screams.

I heard answering shouts from below. I looked around hastily. Each terrace was about five or six feet wide and three to four feet high. Instinctively I made upward, where the bushes and trees seemed thickest at the back of the image. I scrambled over some boulders which seemed to have been left as they were naturally. In the midst I crouched and listened.

I heard some men calling and women replying agitatedly. Gradually the voices died away and there were no sounds save the trickling of water and the distant continuous chanting.

I thought about regaining the road and continuing my explorations, but a green pallor in the east warned me that the moon was coming. So I hunted about for a hiding-place. For some reason or other quite a large patch of land had been left in the natural state behind the bas-relief, due, I supposed, to some tabu.

The suggestion gave me an idea. If I were now standing on tabu ground it was very unlikely that anybody would ever come there; searchers might not dare to walk over the ground in search of me even should they arrive at the conclusion that I was the one-eyed demon who had scared the women. For that reason it would be a good place to hide in.

I began to hunt about but in the darkness I could find no better spot than a crevice between two enormous boulders. There I lay down, wishing that I dared to smoke.

I must have dropped off to sleep—thank Heaven there were no mosquitoes up on the hillside! A slight noise awoke me to find the moon well up. I had just noticed that the chanting had ceased when I heard again the noise.

I listened. The sound resembled a faint tap as of a blind man's stick on a pavement and moreover appeared to come from underneath me. I stood up, peered over round the boulder—an enormous one which leaned lopsidedly against its brother; such are on nearly all Rhodesian *kopjes*, forced by pressure into fantastic positions in the ice age.

I could not see anything moving, and the tapping had stopped. Farther up the crevice which formed my hiding-place was a gnarled tree growing between the great rocks barring my passage.

Now nearly every Mashona village is built on a *kopje*, which is frequently full of caves used variously for grain-bins, witch-doctor practise and bolt-holes when attacked. This was probably the case here. I squirmed my way round the tree. There sure enough under one of the tilted boulders was the dark of a cave-mouth.

However, before investigating I reckoned I had better have a look around. Along the crevice I discovered quite a well-beaten track. The entrance to the cave was well screened by a clump of trees. Beyond them I could see the customary terraces, and not far off one for pedestrians, probably the continuation of the same which I had followed from the door to the shrine.

Being satisfied that no one was around, I laid my rifle on the ground and flashed my torch beneath the boulder. The ordinary cave-mouth had been enlarged artificially, for it was square like a door. Within were steps leading into a corridor in the rock.

Just as I stepped forward, into the white glare of my torch walked a small figure clad in a white robe. Startled or rather amazed, black eyes stared at the light. I caught a glimpse of a swarthy face with a gray beard and hawk-like nose. Upon his arm the figure bore something like a shield which gleamed yellow.

I fired straight at the high light of his

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forehead. The crash of the automatic reverberating in the confined space and the corridor seemed enough to awaken the whole town. He crumpled upon his face and never knew, I think, what or who had slain him.

Lord, I thought, as I looked at him, one of the Phœnician elders that Billy's hop friend spoke about; and I regretted that I had had to kill, for the face seemed so venerable and wide and the eyes still retained that mild look of amazement.

The shield proved to be a mask reaching from the forehead almost to the navel, beautifully made of beaten gold. As I hastily took his robe I noticed that he too wore a golden bracelet like the Matakini's, but it seemed a more intricate design with more hieroglyphics. It was too small for me, so I threw it away. The body I took out and thrust beneath one of the great boulders; and, wrapped in the robe with my rifle strapped underneath it, I hastened into the cave, carrying the mask.

VI

AT THE bottom of the steps I found a narrow corridor running at a fairly steep angle downward. Scared lest the report of the automatic had aroused some one who might come seeking the cause, I hurried along pretty fast without stopping to examine the drawings with which the walls were covered. Now that I was in the city I had no doubt that in all truth it really was built by the Phœnicians or whoever were responsible for the Zimbawbwe and other ruins in Rhodesia.

Presently, flashing my torch in front of me, the beam was lost in darkness. I was standing within a large cavern. I shut off the torch and listened. The sound of trickling water puzzled me; how could it possibly be within these caves?

I chose the left wall and began to follow along that to find out how big the cavern was. After I had gone perhaps fifty yards the flash of the torch glinted on water and I found a subterranean conduit about two feet wide which was obviously of artificial construction, but for what purpose it had been made I could not imagine.

A glance at my watch told me it was half-past four. In these latitudes the sun rises all the year round within a few minutes of six o'clock. I could not see any likely place where I could possibly hide. If the dead elder had passed through these caves evidently others might come. I decided to go back to my crevice between the great boulders. I arrived there without mishap and slept on the other side of the gnarled tree until the brazen sun nearly overhead awoke me.

I was very thirsty and dying for a smoke. The latter I enjoyed very cautiously beneath the boulder. Then I peered out and around. I expected to find men or some slaves working on the gardens, but I could neither hear nor see any signs of them. Then I recollected that it was just afternoon, the hottest part of the day.

Wrapping myself well in my robe, leaving my rifle and mask by the rock, I stalked boldly out in search of water and food. I made for the pool near the bas-relief. After I had drunk my fill I looked curiously for the white objects upon the slab of the altar that I had seen the night before. They were the bones of a small child. What their presence meant I could not guess.

As there was still nobody in sight I strolled along the terrace path, looking about. I had hoped to see something of the lie of the houses; but the olive-trees, which were thickly planted hereabout, prevented any more than an occasional glimpse of flat roofs below me. Once looking upward I caught a vista of the great building on the top of the *kopje*.

I did not feel very hungry in the heat, but cast about for a way of getting food. Farther along I spotted the fronds of bananas and walked toward them, hoping that they were in fruit.

The next moment I saw a big native in dirty robe coming straight toward me. I had no opportunity to run for cover. With my automatic ready beneath the robe I strolled on steadily, holding my head down as if in meditation or prayer, a posture suggested, I suppose, by the association of the place and the monk-like dress. I did not dare look directly at him, but I saw from the edge of my vision that as I passed he dropped upon his knees by the side of the path and heard him softly call some greeting.

I refrained from looking back for some fifty yards, and then he was out of sight. I was rather bucked up by the success of the stratagem and determined to try it again. Evidently my costume was that of

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a very high official or priest, to whom the natives were taught to do homage.

The bananas were not in fruit. But near them was a small house or rather stone hut which I judged to be the home of the man who had passed me, a gardener or something of that sort.

I walked up boldly and looked within. A native woman in a filthy robe was stretched out asleep on a mat with a child beside her. In one corner I saw some ordinary native cooking-gourds and clay jars. I tip-toed over with an eye on the sleeping woman and found some milk, of which I drank as much as I could.

There was a bunch of green bananas and some dried olives and cobs of corn. I loaded up all I could carry and got away without shaking the native lady's slumbers. Then I made straight back to my hiding-place and had a good feed. I now had a store enough to last me several days at least.

Lying in the shade well under the same rock which sheltered my poor victim I smoked and planned. If I attempted to go through the streets I would be sure to encounter many people and probably have my disguise penetrated sooner or later. I might be fairly free to wander about at night; but I was sure, since the elder had come from the caves carved and so decorated, that I would be more likely to discover something of value there than in the streets.

This argument was supported by the theory that the ground behind the image at the pool hiding the cave-mouth was tabu, which meant of course that therein was hidden the secrets of the cult from the vulgar eyes. I decided to continue my subterranean exploring that night and early. Then I went peacefully to sleep.

I AWOKE about an hour before sunset and was immediately aware of the sound of drums and of some wailing instrument as well as of the chanting from the building up on the hill. An hour after sunset I set out, clad in the captured white robe and with the golden mask upon my arm. Under the robe I carried in my pockets the flash-light, the automatic, and the dynamite, together with the rifle in an improvised holster. As soon as I entered the cave-mouth I found the corridor illuminated by the Roman-like oil lamps set at intervals of about fifty feet apart. This confirmed my suspicion that the early hours of the night must be the time of principal activity.

Very cautiously I crept on in my sandals until I was in the shadow at the corner. The cavern was not so large as I had imagined nor so high. Glimmering in the light of the lamps set at each entrance were some dozen or more doors which presumably were like that to my corridor, and in those that were nearly opposite to mine I could see that similar lamps were posted at intervals, evidently to light the way of some one's progress. The conduit of water passed through about the center of the cavern and ran into an unlighted tunnel.

I tried to work out the situation. Evidently, I thought, each priest or whatever he was had a private tunnel leading apparently to his own residence through which he passed to the secret ritual. As all the tunnels converged on the cavern I thought at first that this must be the meeting-hall, and decided, as the man whose robes I wore was dead, that unless they had discovered the body no one would be likely to interfere with me if I stopped where I was. Yet there might well be servants or colleagues.

The only other place to hide was the conduit passage, which was in darkness. I took the chance and ran for it. Fortunately on one side of the water there ran a narrow path, possibly for workmen.

Scarcely had I taken up a crouching position in the shadow when from one of the corridors a hooded figure emerged, garbed exactly as I was, or as the elder whom I had slain had been. The figure walked slowly in a direct line for the door of another corridor, up which it went.

Five minutes later another figure emerged from another door and passed up the same passage. From this I gathered that this cavern was not the meeting-hall, but was merely the hub of the radii formed by the corridors.

I decided to wait until each corridor had given its man, except of course the one I had used. It suddenly occurred to me that Billy, whom the son of Banfangala had said was One of Those, might pass, and I determined that if he did I would follow or call to him. At intervals of minutes and seconds they came along, and I began to get mixed in keeping check. But none had the remotest resemblance to Billy's walk.

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At last according to my tally there remained but one door except my own that had not given a man, and that was within some fifteen feet from me. Five minutes passed; then there emerged a slight figure whom I knew instantly—the Matakini!

I felt so angry at the sight of him that I very nearly let drive. I hesitated whether to run after him and hold him up or not.

Ideas of taking him as a hostage flitted through my mind. Yet I couldn't trust his word; and where on earth was I to keep him prisoner?

According to my calculation he was the last man due. As soon as he had turned the corner of the passage I followed swiftly.

That this corridor led to some particular cave or temple or whatever it could be, was indicated, I noticed, by the guardian bull's heads carved on what would have been door-post; and as soon as I was inside I heard again the wail of instruments and the drums.

None of these corridors was entirely artificial for they wound most erratically; probably they were small natural caves enlarged and tunneled when necessary. But how at that period without drills and dynamite they had done the blasting I could not imagine. I recollected that none of the gold-workings in Rhodesia showed any sign of rock-mining as we moderns know it.

By reason of the tortuous passage and my sandals I had little difficulty in stalking Master Matakini. Quite abruptly the corridor began to mount steeply, and finally it came to a flight of steps, at the top of which I saw brighter light and simultaneously caught the smell of sweet incense.

I hung back a little until the figure of the Matakini had disappeared. Then, crouching, I ran swiftly up the steps and, lying flat, peered over the top, and gasped in amazement.

I had been astonished at the realization that the story of the mysterious city had come true, but the complicated sight—for I couldn't take it all in at once—produced an even more profound emotion—awe.

The first impression registered was of enormous flambeaux burning steadily beneath the bright stars away overhead, grouped in threes about an enormous square of rock, the sides of which were carved in mighty columns like an Egyptian temple, and covered with intricate hieroglyphics; and between these columns were enormous bas-reliefs of fantastic figures, suggesting Assyrian origin, of winged beasts of all sorts, although at that moment I had no time to notice that.

Priests in the shield-like golden masks were emerging every moment from doorways around the sides of evidently similar corridors to that by which I had come, making toward the chancel, which was guarded by a low palisade of ivory and gold. Where, grouping upon their knees, were the other arrivals flanked by statues of more winged animals. Each of these statues seemed to be half-turned as if praying or doing homage to a figure of a bull with the body of a man having the hands held out in front as if bearing a burden—a colossal image whose mass gleamed dull gold in the light of the restless torches.

VII

THIS colossal god upon a pedestal or altar or rock with his arms outstretched over the chancel and illuminated with a profusion of trident flambeaux sat within an enormous alcove or chapel decorated with figures and columns. Away at the back of the temple, which was quite five hundred feet long by about two hundred broad, I could see dimly a body of natives who were evidently chiefs by the occasional glint of a gold bangle on their black arms.

Where the rhythmic throb of drums and the wailing of some reed instruments came from I couldn't determine, but although to my ears they were chaotic the wild strains were somehow not unpleasing. Several times I was compelled to slink a little down my corridor to avoid blacks nude and oiled—eunuchs, I learned later—who patrolled around, some swinging golden censers and others bearing small ampullæ of gold filled with olive-oil for the lamps and torches.

Gazing upward as my eyes got used to the light, I remarked that the site seemed originally to have been several natural caverns which had been knocked into one and the roof broken in forming this vast sunken temple. On the top of the rock walls I could make out the continuous square roofs of buildings with gargoyle decorations against the stars.

All the time I was observing these things, robed and masked figures were appearing from the gloom of the blackness between

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the carven columns of the temple and joining their brethren just within the gold and ivory barricade guarding the sanctity of the chancel, which was raised some two feet above the level of the transept. I hesitated whether to risk going among them. If Billy were there I might be able to recognize him at close quarters in spite of the mask. Yet, I reflected, probably each priest would have his appointed place, and if I could not strike by some lucky chance that of the man I was supposed to be, I would instantly be discovered.

I waited, hoping to see a vacant place, but at that distance I could not find one. Then when all the priests were apparently assembled—some three or four hundred of them—the wailing ceased although the drums continued, and a procession emerged from somewhere.

A figure in a wooden *machilla*, such as I had seen on the street but heavily decorated with gold, was borne by black guards carrying the halberd-like spears that Billy had described. They advanced slowly to the entrance to the channel, where a man in a toga kind of garment without a mask and wearing a golden helmet after the Etruscan pattern got out, bearing some article of gold which glittered in his hands. As he went upon his knees there arose from the congregation of blacks in the body of the temple a long wailing moan like the wind through trees.

Then one of the masked priests took up the golden vase, which seemed to be a kind of pyx, and, walking slowly to the feet of the god, cried out in a loud voice. From the nostrils of the bull issued smoke and fire and a voice roared deeply seemingly within him. From the pyx the priest poured upon the base of the pedestal a libation which left a red stain. Immediately the smoke and flame stopped, and from the negroes in the back came another howl, wilder and fiercer than before.

As, retiring backward, the priest resumed his place the hidden orchestra burst into skirling music like mad bagpipes; and from the gloom behind the flambeaux in the back of the god's chapel there darted one after the other nude girls—evidently, I guessed, the sacred women of the temple—who began wild gyrations before the image, reminding me of the Indian nautch dances.

I had not forgotten Billy nor the Matakini, and while this dance, which suggested a crazy Russian ballet without the color, was in progress I cast about for a way either to mingle with the throng when the priests dispersed or somehow get on to the other side, as I was fairly certain that Billy did not belong as it were to the group on my side, if indeed he were there at all. I had decided that it was more important to get into touch with Billy than to kill or capture the Matakini.

Between the walls covered in bas-relief and the Egyptian-like columns carved out of the rock was an aisle about ten feet wide. I began to wonder whether I dared risk run from pillar to pillar and thus make my way around the temple while the people were engrossed in the dance.

I realized that should any of the blacks see what was apparently a priest out of his proper place within the chancel he might be suspicious. Yet, as the son of Banfangala had implied, they were allowed to know little and taught to have much respect for priestcraft. Waiting until a gang of four eunuchs with golden censers had passed down toward the back, I followed, flitting at intervals of a minute or more, from column to column until I had reached level with the black worshipers, when, remarking that I had been seen, I marched boldly along, trusting solely to the mask.

The ruse succeeded well; for beyond some of the eyes, which looked like white butterflies in the gloom of the body of the temple, fluttering curiously in my direction, nobody took the slightest notice. In this manner I passed four large corridors with tall carven doors, which, I saw in the light of the lamps, ascended—evidently public entrances to the pit as it were—and arrived at the center of the temple on the opposite side, where I hid in the nearest corridor.

IN MY anxiety to find Billy I had omitted to think out where I was to go when the priests returned to their respective tunnels. I felt extremely uncomfortable at the realization of my hasty action. However, there was nothing to do now but wait and see what was about to happen.

The dance was still going on, and the action and the music were becoming more hectic. I began to wonder whether the congregation was to be worked up to some form of religious mania, but they remained the whole time perfectly motionless save

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for a low grunting in rhythm to the drums.

Just as I was trying to imagine what the meaning of the performance could be and how long it was to last, one of a passing band of eunuchs came directly toward the steps upon which I was lying. To shoot would advertise my presence and probably bring the whole mob of blacks and priests upon me. I scuttled down the steps, intending to run around a bend of the corridor. Whether he had spotted something foreign in my walk or not—and as a temple eunuch he would probably know every one of the legitimate priests—I never knew; but at any rate he started to run after me.

I took to my heels and sprinted along the corridor down flights of steps and around corners. Suddenly I came out into a similar cavern to that on the other side, a hub of radiating corridors.

I dodged behind the carved door-post. As he dashed out I leaped and swung my rifle-butt. But I missed his head and the blow glanced off his shoulder.

He stumbled to his knees, came round as swiftly as a leopard and sprang upon me before I could recover to strike. He was fairly fat, but agile; and his oiled, nude body felt like the coils of a serpent. I was hampered by the folds of my robes; but the mask aided me, for he couldn't get his fingers on my windpipe.

He began to yell for help. I slipped backward, dragging him on top of me. As we fell the mask came off and I squirmed so that he came sidewise across me. Then with a desperate effort, grabbing a mass of woolly hair, I managed to get his shoulders across my knee in the neck hold; and, cupping his chin with my right hand, I thrust with all my strength and broke his neck.

Scared lest some of his fellows had heard his cries and would arrive, I glanced around anxiously for a hiding-place. In the center was a similar conduit to that in the other cavern, running into its own tunnel. Seizing my rifle and mask, I pulled him by the shoulders into the darkness, and, panting, sat watching while I recovered. I was relieved that I had settled him; for I had reckoned that the last place which they would search for me would be underground, and had he escaped or had they found his body my whereabouts would be known or guessed.

After some reflection I decided I had better stop where I was. Perhaps if Billy were among the crowd in the temple he would pass through this cavern and I could spot his corridor and follow; or if not I could wait until the eunuchs had put out the lamps, which evidently they did every night or morning, and explore on my own. My fears that some of the eunuchs' comrades would arrive in search of him were somewhat soothed by the reflection that the sound of drums and reed instruments which penetrated down the corridor to this cavern had probably drowned his cries.

I must have been squatting there some two hours before the first robed figure of the returning priests entered the cavern. Eagerly I watched each take off his golden mask, and, mumbling words of salutation, separate for his respective corridor. I had almost given up hope of locating Billy when in the last group his fair beard stood out against the swarthy Phœnicians'. To my dismay, instead of walking alone to a doorway as the others did he was accompanied by an elderly priest. I had intended to follow as soon as the cavern was free, but this unexpected incident upset my plan.

While I hesitated there came a mob of eunuchs who hastened in the wake of their masters. At first I thought that they had come to extinguish the lamps. But a moment's consideration showed me that perhaps these people were dedicated to the temple and had to live always underground; or perhaps they had another exit, in which case they would obviously begin at the open-air entrance and work back. Very carefully I noted Billy's corridor, which was the fifth on the right from the bull-guarded doorway. Within a few minutes the first eunuch returned.

Squatting there beside the corpse, I began to feel most uncanny as light after light went out and the dense blackness of the cavern seemed to be descending upon me like some vast octopus intending to devour me and the corpse by the gurgling stream. So intense was this feeling of being abandoned in the bowels of the earth that I had to restrain myself from crying out when the last attendant disappeared up the main temple corridor, dousing the wick with his fingers as he went.

I have never been particularly imaginative, so I suppose the echo of the light from the lamps still remained in my eyes; perhaps the weird spectacle I had witnessed had overstrung my nerves; but I could have

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sworn that ghostly figures, sometimes human and sometimes animal, were prancing about in the utter darkness of the cavern.

AT LAST I was certain that I could hear the *pad-pad* of paws. I could endure it no longer. I switched on the torch. Within fifteen paces of me was the figure of a woman with a wild maze of gray hair to her waist prancing across the cavern. Bony hands with inch-long nails were making passes in the air. As she came to the conduit she leaped over, making a horrible gesture like that one would imagine a hag to make on a witches' sabbath. Her body was wrinkled like the neck of a tortoise and was of a corpse-like wax color in the glare of the torch. I could not see her eyes for the tangled hair, but the jaw was sunken gum to gum.

Instead of turning toward the beam of light as I expected she continued straight on in her ghastly dance and disappeared up a corridor. Who or what this horrible hag might be I could not imagine, but the sight had effectually shaken my nerves. I felt that I must get out of this sticky and horrific mystery instantly. As I ran across that cavern I switched the torch around on all sides, expecting some new atrocity to rush upon me.

To my further confusion, at some fifty paces or more I found myself instead of in the open air in another small but lofty cave out of which ran three corridors. Down which one had Billy gone? I was annoyed and angry and jumpy.

Hastily I chose the left-hand one, which, I found, bore round to the left as if it were going back in the direction of the temple. I hesitated, turned back and took the middle, which sloped downward and then to my dismay ended in a steep flight of stairs. I was certain that to reach the open it should trend upward as the first had done. What to do I didn't know.

I might discover something if I went on. On the other hand I might well lose myself, or come across some of the temple slaves or that awful hag. I went back. As I approached the first cave I thought I heard the *pad* of sandals again. I listened.

Very cautiously I felt my way to the edge of the door. I saw a light glimmering in the corridor on the right and crouched low with the automatic ready. Again I hesitated whether to run back or not.

A masked figure carrying one of the usual lamps of the corridor emerged and walked quickly down the opposite corridor. The quickness and energy of the walk aroused my suspicions that he might be Billy. I dared not call out, but I followed.

In the big distributing-cavern instead of taking the temple corridor he went up to a portion of the decorated wall. I stood in the shadow and watched, wondering what on earth he was going to do. He began to paw about the figure of a bull in bas-relief. Then, evidently having trouble to see, an irritable exclamation came from him and he unbuckled the mask, revealing a fair head. Recollecting at that moment that the last time I had seen him he had ignored me and what the Matakini had said, I had a sudden panic.

"Billy, old man!" I called softly.

He stared, turned his head and looked around incredulously.

"It's all right; it's me," I continued, stepping out of the corridor.

"Faxy!" he exclaimed; and I knew that he was sane.

VIII

"MY ——, but it's mighty good to see you!" ejaculated Billy. "But how on earth did you get here?"

"Oh, that's a long story," said I, conscious of a haggardness in his features. "But why on earth didn't you recognize me the other day? I ——"

"I daren't, man. I daren't," he began eagerly. "I knew you were here, or I guessed that it was you, and— But say, we can't stop here. Let's get up top."

He glanced around hurriedly, almost fearfully.

"This is a —— of a place," he added vaguely. "Fell for that —— Matakini again. But come on."

He led the way to the right-hand corridor, the one from which he had come; but in the entrance he stopped to look at me again incredulously.

"My —— man, I can't understand how you've got here—alive, I mean; and— Oh, come on!"

He started up the corridor hurriedly; every action was so unlike the cool, self-possessed Billy I had known. Recollecting the grinning Matakini's words, I began to wonder whether they had been torturing him. Farther on, the ground sloped up and

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ended in a flight of stairs, at the top of which I could see the silhouette of trees against the pallor of moonlight.

"They're devils," he muttered as he doused the wick and replaced the lamp at the bottom of the steps. "Didn't they find you?"

"Who?"

"Those black fiends?"

"Eunuch attendants? Yes. I—er—had to kill one."

"You did! You did! But, man, they're sacred!"

"Never mind," said I, beginning to doubt his sanity again. "Go along up and let me have some fresh air."

He stretched out his hand and touched my shoulder.

"——, but it's good to see you, Faxy, old boy! I can't believe— But how did you get the robes?"

"I took them from a priest or whatever he was," I replied. "But go on, for Heaven's sake. We can't stop here all night."

"No, no. That's right; that's right. They may come at any moment."

He scampered up the steps and I followed, glad to escape from the thick subterranean atmosphere to the comparatively fresh air in the open. I found myself in a small copse, through which I could see below in the faint light a long valley and immediately to my right the gleam of a flat roof.

"That's my house," whispered Billy. "I'll take you there; but you won't be able to get out till tonight. Put on your mask if anybody shows up. This is tabu here, and——"

"Yes, I know. Go on."

We descended from the copse and boulder and came upon a terraced path which led to the house. As we walked I gazed about. We were, I had thought, directly on the other side of the *kopje*, but to the left I saw what appeared to be in the moonlight a huge wall completely blocking the natural valley, built apparently from summit to summit of two *kopjes*. I asked Billy what it was.

"An aqueduct," he replied. "The ancient guys built it to bring water from the plateau yonder. Runs through the whole city inside and out."

"What! A water-sewerage and that sort of thing?"

"Yes; flushes the town and comes out below into the river. Sssh!"

At a little distance from the larger house was another, the quarters of the servants or slaves, so that each owner and his family lived entirely alone. In front was a small artificial plateau planted with oleander and other flowering shrubs.

Billy pushed open the gate which he had left ajar. Within was the hall; and beyond, the *atrium* in which lamps were burning, an exact replica of my prison house. Into a spacious room on the right he led me to a spot where were a solid stone table like an altar profusely decorated with figures and cones and a divan built upon a slab of rock against the wall.

"Wait a moment," said Billy as I put my rifle in a corner. "Before we begin I want a drink."

He drew from a corner somewhere a golden ampulla and some golden goblets. He set them on the rock table and poured out some yellow fluid which he diluted with water from a stone vessel.

"Good Lord!" said I as I brought the goblet to my lips, supposing it to be wine. "Whisky! Here!"

"Sure. I told you so, didn't I?" said Billy, and gulped; and then to my further astonishment he proffered a box of Turkish cigarets.

In this cool, quiet room I began to lose my sense of horrific mystery, and the little touches of civilization were soothing. Billy seemed to experience the same effect.

"Phew!" said he with a sigh of relief. "I feel better! I was badly rattled tonight to tell the truth; and then you scared the life out of me. I thought you were your own ghost, old boy, for I was sure you had either gotten away or were dead.

"Yes, I knew you were a prisoner, and I made plans to get you out; but before I could do anything I heard you had escaped. You see that's why I daren't recognize you, for if the Matakini knew that I knew you——"

"He must have," I interrupted, "for he remembers me from Inyanga days."

"The —— he does! Man, but this is some complicated outfit. Faxy, old boy, I've fallen down badly and I'm mighty sorry that I've brought you into it."

"But you haven't. I came poking along on my own."

"Yes; but you wouldn't have if I hadn't tried to tell you that yarn about—about this place. What time is it?"

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"Quarter to three."

"Quarter to three? Oh, well; it doesn't matter. We're safe here to talk all day unless the Matakini comes butting in. But that won't be until after the siesta unless he knows you're here. I'm never sure what that brute does know.

"Now get busy and tell me how you've gotten here anyway. Then we'll try to clear up things a bit. I hate admitting it, but the Matakini has had me badly and now I'm —— if I know where I'm due to get off. But fire ahead."

I related all that I've written from the time Billy showed me the golden ampulla in the hotel room at Beira.

"THAT old hag is Mannagi-Arbela," Billy explained when I had finished and the dawn had come. "She's sacred. She's called the mother of the tribe and is blind, deaf, dumb and mad and supposed to be a hundred and forty years old and immortal. And you were right about the system of defense; they have rings of tribes outside this one who are absolutely faithful under the tabu and the degrees of masonry. That's why the Portuguese have had every expedition they've sent anywhere in this neighborhood wiped out, for the natives were organized and equipped by these—these people."

"Are they really Phœnicians?"

"Sure they are— What's left of 'em. That fellow you shot was Ishtar Iddina, one of the inner cult. Probably they haven't missed him until last night or this morning. ——, man, what a pity you didn't take his bracelet!"

"Why?"

"Why? It's the mark of the inner cult, the thirty-third degree."

He thrust out his bracelet.

"Mine," he continued, "is only the thirtieth. I was planning to get you in here with me with one of these bangles; but look here, the thing's so darned complicated I'd better tell you the yarn straight so's you can thread things together. Where had I got to when they shanghaied me in Beira?"

"You hadn't said a word about yourself. You had merely told me the story that the hop fiend told you."

"That's right. Well, here; have another drink. We need it, I reckon."

"But wait a moment," I said as he was lighting a cigaret. "Clear up my trip first. What was this hokum-pokum in the temple last night?"

"Sunday evening service," said he with a sudden harsh laugh.

"What the —— d'you mean?"

"Exactly what I said. I've told you these people, the priests you saw, are really the last of the Phœnicians and their religion is older than the Passover; dates, as you ought to know, to pre Old Testament days. 'And the Lord God rested on the seventh day.' Yesterday was their seventh day."

"Good Lord!" said I, feeling, I don't know why, rather shocked.

"Semitic, of course, like the Moabites; but founded on the same idea, I think."

"But the idol—the bull; what does that represent?"

"Why Baal, Moloch, the Golden Calf! The same thing that the what-do-you-call-'ems were worshiping when Moses came down from the mountain with the tablets of the law."

"Good ——!"

"Man, you're 'way back here about twenty centuries or more before Christ. It's the original masonry from whom Solomon must have pinched the idea, or they say he did. These people are the children of Abraham. Don't you remember that passage—in Exodus, isn't it—where God calls on Abraham to sacrifice his eldest born, Isaac, and the old man is just about to do it when the angel speaks to him and he finds a ram stuck in a thicket near by which he substitutes? Well, these people are *before* that! They haven't arrived at the substitute!"

"What!"

Then I recalled the baby's bones upon the altar which the women were worshiping in the garden before the bull-headed god.

"D' you actually mean," I gasped, "that they still sacrifice their eldest born?"

"Their people, the blacks, do. But whether the Phœnicians do or not I don't yet know. *That's* the point."

He leaped up in his excitement.

"I was just about to be raised to the thirty-first degree," he went on, "when that cursed Beira trip spoiled me. It was a trap, a test. Man, you don't know. It's the twenty-first of September—the vernal equinox on this side of the equator—and the great sacrificial feast of the year commences tonight and I'm not raised. They have the show in the grand temple. I wasn't even

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allowed to see it last year. The populace go crazy. But beneath that temple is another temple only open to the inner cult, the thirty-first, thirty-second and thirty-third degrees."

"Do those only wear the mask?"

"No; only the priests; but they're all that now except Tchelkonos, the king—the fellow in the golden helmet—and he can't be. The laymen—natives—think that the masked priests are the demons of Baal and that to see their faces would be death. That's why each priest enters the temple secretly by the tunnels. By day they're just ordinary elders of the tribe."

"Like the West African bull-roaring masked priests," said I, "who are supposed to turn themselves into leopards or something."

"Sure, that's the idea."

"But how many of them are there?"

"Several hundred."

"But they were all old men."

"That's it! That's it! They're the last of 'em. They came here over two thousand years ago. All over Inyanga way, Zimbawbwe, are ruins of their old cities. This is the last. They've nearly died out and they can't get any children. They have a few young girls, but no young men.

"Don't you see? *No young men.* Always they've sacrified the eldest sons, which naturally hastened the race-suicide. The only male children are a few of the Matakini's. Man, they wanted me to marry a dozen or more of their wives. Nothing doing, of course."

"But you're not a Phœnician."

"They pretend I am because of the sacred bangle. That's why I'm not dead or—That's it; that's it!"

He leaped up excitedly again.

"You remember those fellows the hop fiend spoke about who disappeared? Don't you see? Harvey—you know, the English partner I told you about whom I thought was dead. But he *isn't!* I only found it out today from that girl you saw me riding with. *Whom* do they sacrifice?"

"You mean that they are going to sacrifice that chap Harvey?"

"I don't know. But if they accept me as a genuine Phœnician they may wink by necessity at other things. They may have found a substitute for the sacrifical first-born. They can't pass off a black for the body of a Phœnician."

He stopped short and sat down quietly.

"Say, I'd better tell the story so that you'll know where you're at, as they say."

IX

"WELL," began Billy, "I stopped off at Beira and pottered around but couldn't get a line on anything. The Portuguese had just had another expedition wiped out and weren't keen on giving any information about their alleged territory anyway.

"I went on through Umtali up to Inyanga. Just the same, except that they've got a stone-built store across the *spruit* and the camp's much bigger. Scarcely any of the old crowd left. Daycomb got a commission and is down at Bulawayo. Pete's dead and Mac's gone.

"By chance I found old Wilkie there. He's got half a dozen stores all over the country now. I merely hinted at the yarn and he turned it down flat. He always was a skeptical old cuss anyway.

"But a point on which I did get information of my man's yarn in the hop-joint was that a party of six men actually had deserted from Inyanga troop and were supposed to have reached Beira and made their way to England. Any rate they had never been heard of again.

"Another point was that since then two of our fellows had disappeared somewhere around the Ruania—supposed to have been killed by lions—and also two prospectors and a missionary. But then as you know fellows are always disappearing somewhere or other.

"Two of the prospectors were reported to have been seen up in Nyassa way so the supposition was that they had merely taken it into their heads to go to Uganda or somewhere north. Taking into consideration the normal conditions of frontier life, there was nothing remarkable about it all.

"I went on across to Motokos. Don't quite know why. Just to see that bald-faced *kopje* again, I think. But passing through the country of the ruins I just naturally had to fossack around, not expecting really to find anything worth while. D'you recollect the country between the Musisi and the Inyadiri where the ruins are pretty thick?"

"Lord, yes," said I. "That was where I met the Matakini dressed up in your pants."

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"That's right. Sure. Well, there's a very fine specimen of the fortifications and terraces up on a *kopje*—that is, fine for that portion of Rhodesia. Most of the terraces have, as you know, been nearly obliterated by the action of rain and what-not.

"I got kind of interested in one of the better preserved and while examining it noticed a queer kind of hump or mound. I set my boys digging around it and found that it had been what I now know as one of the tabu places. The mound had been caused by the earth piling up over a local shrine of the Baal. Of course that excited me some, and I fossacked more with the result that I came on this bangle here.

"I hunted about like mad but didn't discover another darn thing except some broken shards and clay ampullæ. I guess the other stuff must have been looted centuries ago.

"Well, I was all up in the air, you bet. But I went on to Motokos and saw Peacock and Win Head, hoping that I could work one or both of 'em up to come with me. But Peacock was down with blackwater. I stayed with him long enough to pull him through and then went on to see Win. Nothing doing. He always was a cantakerous old cuss and he was frankly skeptical.

"However, in talking he mentioned that he had known the Matakini for about fifteen years. Said as far as he knew that he was one of the first whites in that country to the north of the Ruania and back of the Inyanga; also said—which was more interesting—that many years ago the Matakini had wanted him to go in with him on a prospecting expedition over the Pungwe, and by way of heating him up had shown him some splendid samples of nuggets and talked a lot about a rich alluvial field he'd located.

"But Win said he didn't like him, and anyway he was just getting over a bad spell of malaria and dysentery and wasn't fit to take the field. Later he had heard vaguely that the Matakini had found a partner in Salisbury, but who he was and what happened to him he didn't know. Beyond reminding me that I owed one to the Matakini the name didn't interest me, for of course I didn't connect him with this yarn at all at that time.

"I had half a mind to start on my own from Inyanga and try to follow the trail of the deserters; but anyway I had to return to Umtali to outfit, and from there I could more easily, I reckoned, work along the eastern slopes of the Inyanga. And another thing: I thought a partner or two would be more likely to succeed than playing a lone hand.

"Well, there I met Harvey. Big fellow about forty—regular roughneck. Don't know whether you'll remember him or not, but he used to run the Christmas Pass store in our days. He'd made a little money and been back home, but the climate and the people drove him crazy and back he came.

"He was at a loose end and as I couldn't find any one else who'd look at the proposition I decided to try to persuade him to come in with me and told him the yarn. He thought it was just bull, but he was willing to take a chance.

"WE OUTFITTED right there and fortunately got hold of some ex-Black Watch (native police) who of course were trained. For the first fifty miles or more we had no trouble at all. Then we bumped the same tribe you did. Oh, by the way—you'll see why presently—I happened to tear my left forearm badly with a thorn which began to suppurate a little, so I was wearing my coat instead of the usual shirt sleeves when we arrived there."

"That's where you gave the chief a rifle?"

"Sure I did, darn him!"

"Same *kraal* where the Matakini turned up. Go on."

"We were stronger than you; and Harvey had no nerves and a filthy temper, which I hadn't discovered until too late. He was one of the old pioneers and had no use for natives anyway. After the usual *indaba* we refused to wait for the chief's permission, and, striking camp, announced that if anybody attempted to stop us we would fight. There was the —— of a hubbub, but no one attempted to get in our road.

"That afternoon we made another village, who bolted into the bush; and we occupied the *kraal*. Next morning at daybreak they tried to rush us. It was a pretty scrap. Our Matabele Black Watch fought as they usually do—right up to the limit. In my heart I had begun to curse myself for giving way to Harvey, for these people fought not only with a bravery I didn't expect but with a discipline; and they were well armed

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too. Then I didn't know why. —— knows how many hundreds they seemed. We didn't have a chance. They simply overwhelmed us.

"Of course both of us were determined never to be taken alive. To tell the truth, old boy, I was mighty sick. Madder than —— to think that this was the end of the trip without a dog's run for my money.

"They had wiped out most of our men, and our porters had fled and surrendered. You know what happened to them. And we were boxed in the chief's hut, Harvey at one end and I at the other, firing rifles so hot you couldn't touch the barrels.

"Harvey had gotten a bullet in his thigh, but I was untouched save for a scratch on the head through my hat. Then suddenly they ceased fire and disappeared.

"As we couldn't see anybody we too stopped firing. Harvey thought that it was a ruse. So did I. Presently a voice shouted out from somewhere behind a hut asking us to surrender and saying that we would not be killed. Harvey sent a bullet in the direction by way of answer. There was silence after that.

"We fired a few volleys around in all directions just to work 'em up and make 'em put an end to the business. But there was no reply. Not knowing what to make of it, we held an *indaba* together, but couldn't guess what the game was. By the way they had fought I couldn't get the idea that they were scared of us two white men without any assistance.

"I patched up Harvey's wound as well as I could. We had our medicine-chest with us fortunately.

"Then I looked out and around. Not a sign of anybody could I see save a few goats and chickens. I didn't want to leave Harvey alone, but at his insistence that if they got me he could finish off by himself if they rushed him I went.

"Not a darned soul could I find in the village save the dead; nor did any one fire at me. I couldn't make head nor tail of it. What on earth could have scared 'em off?

"I walked out of the village, which was in fairly thick jungle. There I caught a glimpse of eyes watching me. As nobody fired at me I thought I ought to return the compliment.

"I went back to Harvey, who was as puzzled as I was. Anyway we had scoff, smoked and kept a lookout. Never in all my experience had I known natives or otherwise to act like that; nor had Harvey.

"If he hadn't been wounded we'd have set out on foot. Of course we couldn't take any of our goods, which we had used to make a barricade in the chief's hut. The only thing we could do was to wait and curse. They were of course playing the same game as with you—marking time.

"Next morning—we took watches all night—we heard some one hailing us in English. Imagine my surprize when in answer the Matakini of all people should walk calmly up the village dressed like a native, as he was when you saw him. I recollected him—particularly from the gold bangle on his arm—and I was wondering all the time whether he remembered me. He has the devil's own memory, that son of a gun.

"Two native chiefs with gold bangles on their arms—which excited me some, you bet!—came with him. I happened to be dressing my forearm when they came up. To my astonishment the two chiefs uttered a startled grunt and immediately went down on their knees before me.

" 'Where you get that?' the Matakini demanded, pointing at the bangle on my wounded forearm.

"I guessed instantly that it had some such significance as his own must have. I retorted that that was my business. The Matakini began talking to the two chiefs with him in a dialect I didn't understand, and they appeared to be insisting upon something.

"The Matakini turned and said he wished to speak to me alone. Naturally I refused, saying that Harvey was my partner and asking him who in Hades he was anyway.

"That was the only time I've ever seen the Matakini scared. He glanced again at the bangle on my arm and then at me and spoke some words which I didn't understand. Then said he in English:

" 'I am Tubaal, son of Kain. Who you are?'

"Well, that startled me some! But Harvey didn't get it. I tried to pull my wits together and held out my hand. More shocks, although some I didn't understand. Then the Matakini told me that we could keep all our goods on condition that we came to see the City of Baal. When he said *that* right out loud as it were I nearly threw a fit."

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X

"THEN you don't owe your safety solely to the Phœnician bangle you found in the ruins?" I asked.

"No," replied Billy. "To the combination. Had it merely been the latter I should never have dreamed of using it, and secondly the Matakini, who didn't want me in at all, would have ignored it. But of course I didn't realize all that until afterward.

"He was as good as his words. We both were given hammocks and all our goods were collected. You can imagine that I was pleased all to pieces when I actually saw the city!

"We were both taken to this house here and comfortably installed as you see. But we weren't allowed to go wandering about—or at least Harvey wasn't; and for many days he couldn't. I doctored him myself, but the wound in the thigh proved troublesome.

"As I told you, Harvey was pig-headed and wouldn't understand why I was treated differently from himself; nor would he see that it was to our mutual advantage that it should be so—a fact which had saved his life as well as mine.

"They took me off to see the elders, several of whom to my astonishment spoke English just as my New York man had said. After they had put me through my paces they had a private *indaba* and decided that I must be considered as a full-blown brother Phœnician. The Matakini didn't like this and wanted to oppose the decision; but he couldn't as he himself was practically a stray dog same as me, although in his case there is a possibility that he is a descendant of the Phœnicians. They certainly were in Malta and Cyprus, for the ruins of their temples are there; and the bangle which he has he says was given him by his mother from the temple of Golga in Cyprus, and moreover it was nearly of the highest degree.

"I was to be given a preceptor and after some instruction was raised from one degree to another. In the mean while Harvey began to get more cantankerous and couldn't or wouldn't understand why I should be initiated into the cult when they wouldn't have him.

"I had suggested the matter to my preceptor; but his answer was that Harvey never could be as he wasn't one of us Phœnicians either in body or spirit as he put it—meaning the bangle or the other thing. Harvey accused me of going back upon my partnership in not immediately pinching all the gold in the place and getting out, or something equally idiotic. Do what I would I couldn't persuade him that I was playing straight and for our mutual benefit.

"What could I do? He was having just as easy a time as I. We were excellently fed and even whisky and tobacco were obtained for us from Beira. But nothing would suit him.

"Another point was that he wanted to know everything that went on during the initiating and so on. You can understand why I couldn't tell him.

"The position became very awkward and strained. And I, knowing more than he did, was scared that he would break out and cause trouble.

"I explained my scheme over and over again to him: that when I had reached the highest degree I would have more power both in their eyes and in knowledge of the principles operating these weird people; that when the time came I would play for the breaking of this tabu or whatever it was and bring in civilization.

"Maybe I had altered my point of view somewhat from the crude idea of looting to an interest in this extraordinary relic of prehistoric man, and at the same time saw in the end the same result as far as hard cash went. But no; Harvey couldn't see beyond raiding and looting.

"Rationally he was plumb crazy in insisting that we load up with as much gold as we could and make a getaway, and then organize an expedition to come back and take the place. In the first case I was extremely doubtful of any success in escaping. We were closely watched and would have to penetrate through circles of these subordinate tribes, something of the system having been explained to me by my preceptor; secondly Harvey wouldn't realize that to form an expedition to fight a way here and capture the city one would want another chartered company's police.

"One day after arguing for an hour or so and he had had a bellyful of whisky he accused me of shirking the partnership and said he was going to cut a way out for himself whether I liked to come or not. When I protested at the unfairness he said he'd thank me to keep my mouth shut and not betray him to 'these bleeding natives.'

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"I lost my temper and said he could do what he pleased, of course, but I warned him that the attempt would end in disaster. That night the fool filled a golden ampulla with gold bangles and things and took my golden mask—I think he was crazed with the sight of so much gold—shot some of the slaves and got away.

"This occurred when I was down below there. When I returned and heard what had happened I naturally thought that as well as committing practical suicide he'd put me in the cart too. I couldn't help cursing his impetuous idiocy and waited, wondering what was going to happen.

"After the siesta my preceptor and the Matakini came to me and informed me that my friend had escaped from the city but had been shot down by some of the outer brethren, as they called the natives, in accordance with the law; and most politely expressed their regard for me as a deserving, faithful brother.

"That made me feel rather rotten about Harvey, but after all if he had only trusted me that would never have happened. He had in effect brought the whole thing on himself. Don't you think so, Faxy, old man?"

"Yes; I think I rather do from what you tell me, Billy," I replied, recollecting difficulties I had had myself with strange partners on expeditions who developed unforeseen tempers and cranks.

"Well, I'm glad you do think so; for sometimes I've been rather sore with myself, although what else I could have done I don't know. After Harvey went I progressed pretty rapidly and studied the Phœnician lingo as well. Maybe I was a bit biased or blinded by my interest and the progress I was making, for I began to think that the Matakini wasn't such a bad sort after all.

"True, I didn't see much of him. I had begun to get an inside point of view and to realize that I had tumbled across the last of an otherwise extinct race. Man, there's not such a magnificent example of prehistoric life on earth. And for wealth—well, you've seen! They've got to fall some day; and if the game were botched the whole show would fall into the hands of these blessed Portuguese and you can imagine what they'd do with it!

"D'you know, according to their own legends and records—in cuneiform characters I think they are—they came here over two thousand years ago. In the sixth or seventh century B. C. they were sent by Necho, a king of Egypt, and they claim that they were the first to sail right around Africa. Think of it, man; about the time that Sappho and Æsop strutted around.

"This country and upper Rhodesia had about a dozen cities or more like this. The palaces of the Pharaohs and Cleopatra were furnished with gold and ivory by these people. They sailed in galleons from what must have been a Phœnician seaport which was destroyed by the sea—the sand-spit where Beira stands now.

"They had schools and colleges and thousands of slaves, of whom these tribes are the remnants. They had roads and imported horses."

"HORSES!" I echoed. "But what about the tsetse fly?"

"Wasn't any tsetse fly centuries ago, man! You recollect the king in the golden helmet? They claim that he is the direct descendant of Inarchos, first king of Argos. He lives in the enormous palace built round the lips of the sunken temple with his wives and practically all the women left who are not the wives of the priests.

"No, he isn't a priest. For some reason the king can not be. He is both sacred and yet a layman. The idea is, I think, that he's supposed to know all things without the trouble of learning 'em."

"But are all the other fellows priests?"

"Sure. They're all that are left. You see, they are forbidden like the San Blas Indians to mate with any other tribe. Somewhere about the time old Columbus discovered the States there was a terrible plague which nearly destroyed the lot. The seaport was wiped out too by the sea.

"In their weakened state wild tribes in the interior rose and they had to gather the remnants of their people in this place, the City of Baal. Their galleys were gone and they seem to have been cut off by some Asiatic upheaval, probably when the Turks took Constantinople—the fall of the Eastern Empire.

"They had no more fresh blood coming in so the race began to die out, which was accelerated by this hellish custom of the sacrifice of the first born. Yet they're as proud as Lucifer.

"At the end of the last century they began

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sending out messengers to seek their fellows, but they say that none of the true faith now exist. The Matakini is the only one except myself whom they have admitted, and that because of the bangle; and in his case also his origin on the site of the Temple of Golga, which fact, by the way, they sent to corroborate.

"Their one object now is to preserve the race and faith intact to the end. I mean all this is what I found out then.

"The next shock I got was when my preceptor informed me that on being initiated into the mysteries of the thirty-third degree I am expected to marry about a dozen or so of their women. But once I got there I thought I could find a way out of that.

"All the time I hadn't realized how the Matakini was steadily working against me. He's more fanatical than they are.

"They buttered me up until I fell for the idea that I really had won their confidence. To test it I proposed that I should be allowed to go to Beira on the pretext of getting guns and provisions. Oh, yes; the ancients take quite well to modern whisky!

"I had every intention of keeping my oath. Say, have you ever remarked how quaint it is that a brother never or seldom gives the secrets away even if he abandons the order? I had no intention of telling you that night in Beira more than I am doing now.

"Unknown to me, I was watched the whole time; and when I produced that ampulla the agents thought I was playing traitor and 'outed' you and kidnaped me for judgment at the hands of the brethren. I am safe in a way as long as I am here, for they are forbidden to shed the blood of a brother except the first born—and they haven't any now—and before he's initiated.

"That's why again I pretended that I didn't know you in the street. I was scared that if I did they would imagine collusion and kill you outright."

"But what was your plan to get me in too?"

"You're a brother of the third and I intended to procure you a bangle of the same degree as mine, which would protect you. I felt sure they would adopt you as a Phœnician just as they had done with me.

"When we had passed the thirty-third I reckoned we could move things in the way I had suggested—break the tabu slowly and bring in civilization. That is, I did then; but now——"

"Well, go on."

"When they got me back there was a —— of an *indaba*, and the Matakini gained his point of postponing my thirty-first degree until I had proved my fidelity—darn him—which prevents my discovering the secret rites of the inner temple, to which only those of thirtieth degree onward are admitted, tonight. Until that moment I had had faith—I really had in most of their statements.

"The other day that girl, who is the daughter of my preceptor—one of the crowd whom I'm supposed to marry when I'm initiated—remarked about a splendid stranger she had seen. At first I thought that she meant you. Of course as a woman she knows nothing about the secrets of the cult. But when she mentioned that he was the biggest man she had ever seen I knew that he couldn't be you.

"Yesterday I took a walk toward the aqueduct in a part where I'd never been before, and when passing a walled terrace garden I heard a voice shouting; and, my ——, I'm dead sure it was the voice of Harvey, who they told me had been shot and killed.

"Several facts which I had never noticed all together now, as it were, jumped out at me. The deserters who had disappeared mysteriously, the missing prospectors, the missionary and the Matakini's partner; and the knowledge of the sacrifice of the first born! They haven't had any first born for years. Don't you see they may have adopted a substitute?

"Again, probably the Matakini's pleasant idea was to keep me for a victim instead of a brother. If that's right the Matakini has been a sort of supply agent for the substitute sacrifice. That's what he wanted you and me for when he captured us by the Ruania!"

"Good Lord!" I exclaimed. "Then *that's* what they've been keeping me for!"

"Sure. Probably like the Incas who used to give the sacrifice a —— of a time for a month and then cut his heart out alive."

XI

AS FAR as we could make out from the evidence Billy's surmise seemed too ghastly true. He had been, as he put it, so up in the air at the conclusion that he had decided to try that night to enter the inner temple, and when I had

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found him he had been seeking to locate a secret knob which operated a sliding gate which he believed to be there.

The question now was, What could we possibly do to save Harvey if Billy's theory should be right? To attempt an open rescue by going to the house where Harvey was imprisoned was obviously futile.

We sat discussing plans until a slave came with food. Billy hastily hid me in a corner behind a screen of fiber mats woven in colors into crude pictures of gods and symbolical beasts. After I had shared Billy's lunch—ample for two or three and very good—we decided to have a siesta and renew the discussion afterward. In case of accident Billy made me up a couch in a massage-room—they were great on that—which had stone slabs like a Turkish bath. The massage-room adjoined the *atrium*, which had the usual Roman bath hewn in the solid granite and supplied by the general conduit system.

I was awakened slowly by the sound of voices, and by listening intently through the thick walls decided that the Matakini himself was visiting Billy. He remained for about an hour, and when he had gone Billy came in to me with a grave face.

"I'm more'n ever sure," he broke out, "that that darn little rat is the official sacrifice-hunter."

"What's the matter now? Have they found that elder or the eunuch I killed?"

"No; but they know that Ishtar Iddina is missing, and of course they suspect you. Luckily they seem to think—unless the Matakini was trying to trap me—that you've gotten outside the town. Anyway they don't seem to suspect that you've been down below.

"But the Matakini's showing his hand more; threatening me in an underhand sort of way, hinting that although I'm supposed to be a brother that the brethren are beginning to suspect that I aided you to escape and that if it is proved that I've done so they'll sort of excommunicate me and thus avoid the tabu of taking a brother's life, which leaves one subject to the oath. You know. And until this is proved one way or the other I am suspended; can't go even to the public show tonight. I'm mighty sure that the Matakini's playing up to get me as one of his darned sacrifices."

"Well, but I'm in the same boat, old man."

"You? Oh, sure. But —— it, man, who's going to get you out of the mess if I'm taken too?"

"Don't see what on earth you can do, old boy," I objected, "either for me or for Harvey."

Billy gazed at me as if he were bewildered; then he lighted a cigaret and sat on the end of the couch.

"That's right," he admitted at length. "No more do I. What the —— are we to do? ——," he broke out again; "Harvey, and then you! Just as I was teaching 'em to feed out of my hand! Getting the whole darned outfit where I wanted it!"

I stared at him. He looked at me.

"Good Lord, I'm sorry, old man," said he, interpreting my thoughts. "But I believe I'm going a bit buggy in this darned crazy before-Christ world."

He grinned.

"I'd got a bug in my head," he added, "that I could lead 'em straight to decent civilization, I think, or some fool ideas of that sort. Let's cut the idealism and get down to brass tacks. My ——," he added, "that's queer. The finding of Harvey still alive and the theory about the Matakini's sort of shaken me up. All I know is that something's got to happen."

"Look here, old boy," said I when we had been arguing and arriving at nowhere for some time, "the only thing is that we must get down below tonight and see this big show. If there is a sacrifice and that sort of thing and Harvey happens to be the star, we'll have to rescue him if we can. Anyway we can't let those fiends have him. But you say they won't let you down there?"

"So the Matakini said. But I guess we'll get there all the same and hide in the corridor as you did. That's all there is to it."

We discussed the matter further, but could not discover any other practical plan; and moreover we were wholly unable to hazard a guess as to what we could or would be able to do. Food came along about sundown, and then we prepared.

Billy hadn't a gun of any sort. He had had one, but since the Beira episode they had taken it away from him. He took my rifle and I the automatic.

When we were ready Billy remarked that he wondered whether his slaves were watching him, which gave me a mild shock; and I began to realize the effect of so many months in this atmosphere of early Assyria

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or wherever the Phœnicians orginally came from. He went out to investigate and returned with one native whose scared eyes rolled at the sight of me.

"The others are away at the festival," said Billy, "and I guess they left this gentleman to look after me. We'll just tie him up out of harm's way."

We bound and gagged him and left him in the massage-room. As we walked, carrying our masks, I noticed that the drums, reeds and lutes had already begun.

From a road which ran near the house we could hear the hum of people evidently making for the great temple. Fortunately we met no one in the short distance to the copse which was the tabu ground.

"Look," whispered Billy; "my lamps are not lighted. You creep up one side and I will the other. Then flash your torch to see whether any of 'em are there waiting for me. If any one's there we must get him. If one gets away we're done for sure."

Very cautiously we stole up, and when we were on either side we peeked in and I switched the torch at the same moment. In the beam shone the whites of two pairs of eyes in shiny black faces. Two mouths opened in a yell of terror. Dropping our masks, Billy and I sprang after them.

FOR a moment they were paralyzed by fright at the "demon's eye." I had my hand on an oily shoulder, but it wriggled from my grasp. I heard Billy swear. As I switched on the light I saw two forms racing down the corridor and just beyond the black shadow of a sharp curve, beyond which, I recollected, were steps.

I shut off the torch and ran, hoping that they would be blinded by the glare and fall down the stairs in the sudden darkness. Happily I was right. Either one fouled the other or else they both collided with the angle of the wall, for we arrived at the top in time for the torch to reveal black arms and legs reaching the bottom head foremost.

Billy and I nearly followed suit in our haste to secure them. And when we did we were hard put to it to hold their oiled bodies and keep them from hollering at the same time. In the struggle the torch had fallen on the floor, throwing a useless beam against a wall.

When I had got my fellow half-throttled I grabbed the torch to find out how Billy was getting on. He was just arising from the ground with his robes very much torn; and I noticed that his man did not rise.

"Is he dead?" said I.

"Broke his fool back," answered Billy. "How about your fellow?"

"Better take his legs and we'll take him up outside."

"All right; but we'll have to come back for this fellow in case any of his mates come along."

We did so and left the quick, gagged and tied to a tree, watching over the dead in the little copse.

We found the first chamber already lighted as usual and hurried along to the second, where we decided to hide in the conduit tunnel which I had used before until all the priests had passed through to the temple. The body of the eunuch whose neck I had been compelled to break was still there so we concluded that we had nothing to fear from his discovery.

We talked in whispers as long as we dared, still futilely discussing what we could do. Billy opined that we, or he, should have tried to get in touch with Harvey—if it were Harvey. But it was too late to do anything now.

It was about an hour before the first priest emerged from his corridor. After him the others followed in fairly rapid succession, Billy remarking those on one side and I those on the other to prevent awkward mistakes. All the time we could hear the throb of drums and tang of lutes.

When all had gone we waited about twenty minutes; and then, adjusting the gold masks in case we should meet anybody unforeseen, we marched up the temple corridor. Fortunately the wings of the bull decorating each side of the doorway provided each of us with a good cover.

The king man in the golden helmet and his priests were all in their places and had already begun a weird chant. There were even more lamps and flambeaux, I noticed, about the colossal golden image. Instead of a few hundred chiefs as on the previous evening, the body of the temple from the transept to the public entrance was a mass of natives, men and women, several thousands, upon whose ebony arms only here and there gleamed gold bangles, the relative scarcity of these ornaments indicating that the ordinary public, as it were, were admitted.

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Around the aisles between the pillars and the decorated walls paraded the bands of oiled eunuchs swinging golden censers. For quite an hour or more the chanting continued. As the music ceased a tallish man—the high priest, Billy whispered to me—advanced a few paces toward the altar and began another chant in an extremely high and clear tenor which seemed to ring all around the vast temple in the silence.

This continued for about ten minutes. Then as he stopped the golden bull bellowed and belched fire from his nostrils and every person in the great audience, including priests, eunuchs and the congregation, except the high priest, flung themselves forward upon the ground and groaned lustily in unison.

As the belching and bellowing ceased the moaning stopped. All raised their heads—I noticed the frightened, rolling eyes of those near me—as a singularly sweet voice like a female's seemed to emerge from the throat of the brazen god, singing what appeared to be a lament in verse; for at the end of each stanza the whole body of the priests answered in a bass chorus like a trained choir.

This litany, which continued for some twenty minutes or more, was to my ears pleasing; wild, with a terrible melancholy running through it, reminding me of a shepherd's song I had heard in the Andes which was supposed to be an ancient chant of the Inca priests. Billy said he had never heard it before.

When the god's very beautiful voice ceased the music burst out—a fast, exciting rhythm like a hymn of war. I expected a kind of liturgy, such as they had celebrated before with the host in the pyx; but instead of this, I saw that as the hymn ceased abruptly, the king and priests and the congregation again flung themselves flat.

Save for the breathing of the multitude there was such silence that from away above beneath the bright stars came the faint, harsh squall of a forest bird.

While we were wondering what was going to happen there dashed from each side of the god nude young girls with long hair, who began a wild dance in front of the altar to the clashing of cymbals which they carried in their hands. Evidently it was tabu to look, for not a head moved from the ground. I detected another commotion to one side of the idol. This developed into more women carrying a heavy weight. The sacrifice?

What their movements were we could not see. Suddenly the dancers fled like the ballet in a theater, revealing in the outstretched hands of the bull-god the gross figure of a white man bound and naked.

As in the silence the congregation and priests raised their heads and began to moan, the ground at the base of the idol opened and from the cavity came flames and smoke.

"Good ——," I exclaimed.

Forgetting caution, we stood up to see whether we could recognize Harvey; and as we stared the bull snorted fire again and the hands moved down, allowing the bound body to slide slowly until it fell into the roaring fire.

XII

FOR a few moments we both were too startled and horrified to speak. Fortunately everybody was too absorbed in groaning and moaning hysterically to notice us standing in the doorway of the temple corridor. The priests were howling like dervishes to the clangor of the music.

The identity of Harvey had disappeared. Only the facts that the victim had been undoubtedly a white man and that it was too late to rescue him remained.

But what to do? To attempt to shoot up the crowd would quickly be ended by our being torn to pieces by the excited mob.

As we hesitated, the flames ceased, evidently owing to the closure of the trap in front of the god. Billy decided matters by clutching my arm and shouting in my ear.

"The secret door. Keep on your mask. Come on!"

We ran hastily back to the first chamber, and while I held the torch Billy examined the most prominent figure on the bas-relief along the walls. Feverishly he tried to pull, to push and to twist every projection that might be a secret button. Nothing moved.

"I know there's a door in every cavern like this," he remarked, and began upon another figure with no result.

"It's more than probably concealed in the figure of the god," I commented. "Let's dynamite it."

"Dynamite!" he exclaimed scornfully. "Where on earth——"

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"I have," said I, producing a stick, a fuse and a few detonators from my pocket. "Here; let's shove it in the brute's nostrils," I added, partly influenced by a childish wish to hurt the god of brutality and secondly because the nostrils were the only cavities. Then as I began to push the stick in as far as I could Billy shouted—

"It's moving, by ——; it's moving!"

Sure enough, slowly a block of the wall about five feet broad, the edges of which were cunningly hidden by the decoration, began to swing on a pivot. Billy had naturally tried every projection, whereas the secret spring was in one or both of the cavities. Within was darkness, but the torch revealed a corridor with steps descending steeply. Inside we tried to shut the door; but evidently there was another spring within, and we hadn't time to spare to search for it.

After about fifty or sixty steps we reached the level, along which we hurried, still wearing our masks, which would at any rate conceal our identity should we meet any one. We saw a yellow gleam round a curve and approached cautiously. Through the door, the silhouette of which was broken by the wings of the mythological bull, glowing in the light of thousands of oil lamps was what appeared to be a replica of the temple above in solid gold.

Every figure of the hundreds around the walls and columns was clothed in beaten metal. Upon the altar was another idol of the bull-god even more colossal, whose eyes gleamed like some monstrous cat, whose nostrils shot beams of blood, and whose glittering hands, instead of being outstretched for a victim, were posed Buddha-fashion as if in satisfaction upon the knees, just in front of a heap of white objects upon the altar table.

But what puzzled us was that the transept of the temple was covered with long stone altars or daïses about two feet from the ground which were already set with hundreds of golden platters and ampullæ; around were low divans, Roman fashion, suggesting a vast banquet. Behind another barricade of gold and ivory the chancel was similarly equipped, but the table and the floor were of beaten gold.

We certainly had not forgotten for what we had come, yet the sight of that temple of gold made us as if stupefied with drunkenness. Billy was the first to recover. He drew my attention to a fact that I had not even noticed.

"Good Lord, there isn't a man here!" he exclaimed.

As we held a whispered consultation there came a burst, dim but distinct, of the wild strains of the other temple. Looking around, we made out in the lofty roof a number of black shafts which were apparently ventilating-tunnels. On the opposite side of the temple were two other corridor-entrances like the one in which we were standing.

We decided to explore. With our guns ready beneath our robes we stalked boldly up the transept, remarking the thickness of the shell-like golden platters. Thence we went across the golden floor of the chancel. As we approached the altar before the bull-god we saw that the heap of white things was composed of human bones, babies' bones such as I had seen the first night before the shrine in the grove.

"Good ——, Billy," I exclaimed, pointing to an adult femur, "Harvey's gone—if he was Harvey!"

"Mighty strange," he commented, examining the bone. "If Harvey was the victim he was cast into the fire; but you can't burn a body and retain the bones."

The god's eyes, we saw, were great emeralds; and the blood-stained beams of the nostrils were caused by enormous rubies.

"I never knew there were emeralds in Africa—around here, at all events," remarked Billy.

"Or rubies," said I. "But probably they're very ancient; brought them with them from Assyria or wherever they came from."

"Sssh!" Again came the outburst of wild music, which ceased as abruptly.

"This must have some connection with the upper temple," I observed.

"Probably," assented Billy. "Possibly the sound comes down when they open the trap of the furnace. Let's find out."

Around at the back of the great image were three doors, each of which was illuminated. We hesitated which to follow.

"Wait for the next sound of music and follow that," suggested Billy. "That ought to lead somewhere."

THE next time it came undoubtedly from the center corridor. I admit myself that as we crept along deeper into the extraordinary bowels of the mountain I thought that, even if we did release

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Harvey or whoever he was, in the end we should each provide a sacrifice for the great god Baal.

Twenty yards on in the ensuing silence we caught the murmur of voices. Creeping along very cautiously, we came to a cavern brightly lighted, in which were some dozen eunuchs squatting and standing in attitudes of expectation around what appeared to be an enormous bed or divan.

Presently as we watched, wondering what on earth could be happening, a bright red glow in the roof revealed a shaft. Simultaneously we heard a burst of music. A few seconds afterward a dark body fell out of the roof cavity on to the big divan and bounced. As the music was shut off one of the eunuchs seized a tiny black baby and bore it off in his arms.

"Good —— ——!" I ejaculated. "The first born!"

"That fire's a fake!" exclaimed Billy. "They don't burn 'em! *That's* why those bones are white!"

"But if that's so, then Harvey, or whoever he was, isn't dead. We may be in time yet! Let's hold up these fellows and investigate."

"No, no!" urged Billy. "Wait a moment. I think I've got a hunch that each of these eunuchs means one baby; and then we're free."

Billy was right. The rain of babies from a fiery sky continued.

"Look here," said I. "This show is going to last some time. Let's investigate those other corridors."

We returned; and, listening at the left-hand one, we caught the faint, continuous sound of music and chanting; then suddenly the bellow of the god.

We entered, and ten yards down found another shaft, up which ran a spiral staircase carved out of the rock. Billy leading, we began to ascend. The light from the lamp below did not carry far, but above glimmered the faint glow of a single light. As we mounted Billy stopped and under cover of the music whispered:

"There's a priest guy on a kind of platform. I can't make out what he's doing. He's alone, I think."

We proceeded a little farther and could see that the man stood in a small kind of cave scarcely big enough to stand erect in, and appeared to be working at something.

Just then came another bellow and a flash of red.

"I've got it! Next time the bull bellows drop him with your automatic."

We waited. With the flash of red and as the bellow was in full blast I fired. The bellow ended in a snort as the priest crumpled and fell off the platform down the shaft, nearly taking Billy with him. We hurried to the top and found ourselves in a small chamber.

At first we did not realize that we were inside the god's great head until, peering through two of five apertures, we saw the vast mass of natives in the body of the upper temple moaning and howling in the midst of an indescribable saturnalia.

The upper two holes were the eyes, the middle tubes were the nostrils and the lower slit, into which was stuck a cow's horn, the mouth. Upon a slab which acted as a table were some smoldering fagots of resinous wood and a primitive bellows made out of a goatskin, through which evidently the priest had blown fire through the nostrils of the god Baal for the edification of the assemblage.

Looking down the nostrils at a lower elevation than the eyes, we could observe the chancel. The last of a procession of priests was defiling behind the god, and the gold-helmeted king was being carried away in his golden *machilla*. We held a hurried consultation.

"That baby-sacrifice is over," declared Billy, "and now those darned beasts are up to some more deviltry. Let's get down."

"No," said I; "one moment. We're in this time to see it through. Let's dynamite the —— thing. That'll put the fear of God in 'em!"

"By —— that's the great idea," assented Billy. "Look here, shove a long fuse in so as to give us time to get down and rush that mob of baby-murderers. Then she ought to scare —— out of 'em and generally give 'em something else to think about."

We lost some few minutes finding a convenient spot to place the charge. There was no tool of any sort that we could use to make a hole, so I jammed the stick as hard as I dared in the horn of the mouth and adjusted a fuse timed for about ten minutes. Then, firing her, we scurried down. At the bottom, undiscovered, we found the officiating priest as dead as his own god.

Then, readjusting our masks, we advanced. Passing across the mouth of the

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entrance at the back of the god was the last of a procession of eunuchs bearing a heavy burden. Taking a chance, we crept after them, seeking cover behind the bulk of the idol.

In the body of the temple were some hundreds of the priests without their masks lolling upon the divans in the Roman manner. Among them circulated the women I had seen dancing on the previous evening.

On the floor of the golden chancel before the golden table lounged thirty-two other priests, also without masks. These were evidently of the highest degree, the thirty-third. At the far end we recognized the Matakini. From somewhere hidden came wild music similar to that in the upper temple.

What the burden was that the eunuchs had been carrying we could not see as they were occupied directly in front of the god, evidently at the altar.

"Say," whispered Billy, "shove another stick in the back of this fellow. Time her about the same. The other will be the cue for us to get out of the light and start something."

This time from the outside it was easier to find a likely spot, for the god was provided with a bull's tail. Tight under that I wedged the charge and fired the fuse, making it an inch shorter than the first one. With a keen eye on my wrist-watch we waited.

"About two minutes to go," I whispered.

Suddenly, almost drowning the chanting, came a bellow of rage, and a voice in English poured out a terrible stream of oaths such as I never have heard matched.

"That's Harvey, all right!" whispered Billy, and I swear he chuckled. "Let's peek!"

We crept quietly along the side of the great pedestal. Upon the altar lay the naked form of an enormously fat blond man, and in front of him stood a white-bearded priest chanting as he held aloft a golden knife.

Just as the weapon flashed yellow above the belly my automatic spat. The high priest collapsed. The next instant Billy's rifle cracked. Another priest in the act of rising pitched across the golden table.

"Quick!" yelled Billy. "Hold 'em off while I cut Harvey loose!"

At the first report every priest in the temple was on his feet. Eunuchs and women ran yelling and screaming in every direction. One priest after another sprawled on the golden floor as they rushed, while Billy, seizing the golden knife of sacrifice, hewed Harvey's bonds.

"Back away!" I shouted as I saw that Harvey was free. "She's going!"

Simultaneously with my words came a reverberating roar. The golden walls of the temple seemed to quiver. Priests, women and eunuchs were paralyzed in grotesque attitudes of rage and fear.

"Come on! Come!" I heard Billy yelling at Harvey.

We ran swiftly across to the corridor from which we had entered. Then just as a great clamor broke out the colossal golden god rose bodily forward and as the concussion smote us, crashed upon the golden table, burying the high priest beneath him.

XIII

WITH the last reverberation of the fall of the god came a terrible wail as of one in mortal agony. This was taken up by the remainder of the priests, who one and all threw themselves upon the ground and began to tear their robes and pluck out their beards.

"Come on," said I; "they've forgotten us. Up the corridor there and get out through the open gate."

"Here!" exclaimed Harvey, waddling a few paces to clutch a gleaming eye of the god that had been shot across the chancel. "What about loading up some of these —— trinkets and things?"

"Are you still crazy?" demanded Billy wrathfully. "Shut up and come along or they'll wake up and get after us in a minute."

Piloting Harvey on each side, we ran across the temple right through the yowling women and eunuchs and up the corridor by which we had entered. But at the top we found that the slab of rock had either closed automatically or been shut.

"Blow it up," urged Billy, but I couldn't as I hadn't any more dynamite-sticks.

Frantically he tried to find the secret spring, but the door on the inside was undecorated and presented a bare surface of smooth rock with no cavity of any sort.

"We'll go back," decided Billy, "although we may have to fight our way through. Come on!"

Again Harvey jibbed, grumbling and swearing that we had got him into an adjective mess. He trotted ahead after Billy,

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panting like a white hippopotamus. In the temple we found priests still wailing and tearing their clothes.

The center of the three doors brought us into the bottom of the fire-trap. Passing through another short corridor, we came into a long, low cavern, undecorated, around the sides of which were a dozen fires or more burning beneath great metal caldrons looking like an enormous kitchen. At the far end was a crowd of terrified eunuchs yammering at what was apparently a closed door.

"We'll never get through that bunch!" exclaimed Billy. "What's that?" A sullen continuous roar began. "Come on back through the temple!"

As we reached the door the roar increased in volume and we saw a flood of water over the floor of the temple already a foot deep in which priests were flopping about, yowling and tearing their hair; others were embracing women, who were weeping, laughing and dancing. As we paused to gaze at this bedlam a shriek drew our attention to a figure dancing on top of the fallen god—the Matakini, who screamed out:

"The Law! The Law! After Baal ees the flood! The Law! The Law!"

"That —— maniac's let loose the aqueduct on us," said Billy.

"The shaft to the other temple," I shouted. "Come, Billy! The fall of the god's driven them insane."

We ran across the temple again. Harvey panted after us, clutching his emerald and clanking with gold.

We passed the body of the dead priest and reached the spiral stairway, which was intact. Mounting, we came out through a hole where had stood the other idol. The upper temple was deserted. The floor was covered with stone platters and ampullæ of wine, most of them overset or broken.

They had been feasting as well as carousing, for scattered about were lumps of white meat. The formation of one attracted my attention. I stopped to pick it up. It was a baby's hand!

Instantly I saw the explanation of the many unaccountable things. They were cannibals! That was why their prisoners were treated so well! Harvey, fat and panting beside me! That was why the child's bones of the great Baal's altar below and of the shrine in the grove were white.

The burning was symbolical of the sacrifice of the first fruit or first born to Baal, of which they ate themselves—the eons-old practise of savage races to obtain by the act, as they imagined, part of the strength and wisdom of the god.

The Phœnicians themselves could no longer afford first born; the religious law had been altered, as usual, to satisfy the demands of expediency. The Matakini had been, as Billy had surmised, the official sacrifice-hunter. That was why in the police days he had wanted both Billy and me; that was where five of the deserters, the prospectors and the missionary had gone!

WHEN we reached the top of the steps of the public entrance we found ourselves in a large courtyard, in the walls of which were several doors profusely decorated. At the far end was an open gate illuminated by golden torches, which led into the open. The streets were deserted.

At Billy's suggestion we went to hunt up the king fellow with our masks on, leaving the naked Harvey decorated with loot to wait for our return. We found the old man with a crowd of women and guards in the hall of an *atrium* of the palace.

Sternly Billy announced that the temple had been destroyed by the anger of Baal and that to the only two survivors of the sacred priesthood had the god given his confidence and commands. Knowing nothing of the secret rites or even the inner theology and accustomed to obey the priests implicitly, the ancient king Tchelkonos had our wishes carried out without demurring, sending messengers to the native population—who each and all had fled the city, believing that like Sodom and Gomorrah it was about to be destroyed—ordering them to [illegible] await the commands of the m[illegible] *vide* Billy and me—of the god. [illegible] morrow they did.

But when we went back fo[illegible] had disappeared. That he had [illegible] by his short-sighted craze for [illegible] go back into the temple was [illegible] had left his booty, emerald [illegible] corner of the courtyard. Wh[illegible] fallen into the water or had be[illegible] head we never knew; although weeks la[illegible] when we had drained the temp[illegible] blasting the doors open, every one of which the maniac Matakini or one of the priests had closed to insure their own doom, we came upon his fat carcass among the others.

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RULE of the SEA

By Kenneth Howell

HAD it been a Chinaman who owned the small tramp steamer, *Starlight*, and perhaps a Dutchman who owned the sixty thousand dollars, months, running probably into a year, would have passed in the development of the intricacies of partnership, the backings and fillings, the craftiness of the one pitted against the stolid greed of the other.

But Holt, Crandall & Co. had birth in the Café Colon in Buenos Aires during the course of an excellent dinner. The two young Americans, fairly well known to each other, talked open business from the start. Neither man was credulous or overtrustful of chance acquaintances Billy, and y in a foreign port, but both

We cre he sort well called hard-bitten; great pede with the outward stamp of naked form ess that is the stamp of the and in fror he inner sense of it; the steadpriest chant e of his fitness to guard his

Just as t that is stronger than mere the belly t John Crandall with a more priest collar ually strong faith in himself rifle cracke ility to nurse his inheritance rising June

"Sixty thousand dollars, Holt."

while A l across the table and gazed fixedly at the owner and captain of the *Starlight*.

"Sixty thousand dollars and myself, a fighting man." A grim smile, a tense, savage smile came over his dark thin face. "Yes, my big young sea-captain, a fighting man. France," he added simply, touching lightly the empty left sleeve of his dinner-coat.

Holt nodded.

"So they told me—at the Masters' Club," he said.

He fell into a long silence, then spoke slowly, as if he knew that the partnership was being settled here, now, over the wine, as if the legal part, the details of organization, the guarantees, that would follow in proper sequence, defined by long conferences and fixed by law, were of secondary importance. Now it was that the essence of the partnership was reached.

Even as Crandall listened to the words of the captain and warmed to their strength and sincerity, he was struck again with the extraordinary appearance of the big man sitting opposite him. Captain Holt had the fresh, clear face of a girl. His features were clean-cut, regular. Thick, curly, blond hair was close cropped on his well-shaped head and he was built like a wrestler, compact, powerful, symmetrically big.

His rise to the ownership and command of the *Starlight* had been one long uphill fight, aided by what he always termed his "pay-streak of luck," and he had fought with his mind, his savings from many voyages, and at long intervals when forced into it, with the power and menace of his sea-toughened body.

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There he sat, opposite Crandall, with the soft glow of the shaded table-lamp lighting up his bronzed face and his steady gray eyes, forceful, a bit bleak. And he spoke, touching again upon his belief that a partner ashore, a man whom he could trust as himself, to start a shipping-firm would mean a fortune here in the South American trade, running from the Central Americas to the West Indies, to Rio de Janeiro and down to the Port of Madryn, picking up port-to-port coastwise trade.

Crandall would find greater gain in being partner in a shipping-firm, greater satisfaction, than putting his money into the ship-chandler's business which he had admitted to Holt a few days before had been his intention.

Crandall listened closely as the other finished his talk, ending with the financial terms, slowly spoken, carefully spoken, terms that were meant, terms that once and for all brought into existence a friendship between the two men that was to be even closer than their business partnership. In his manner the sea-captain spoke:

"Crandall, all of my earnings at present, except for a slight margin over the pay I draw as her captain, go into the operation of the *Starlight*. She is no gold-mine as I am able to run her. So my contribution to the partnership is the steamer itself and my services. Your contribution is sixty thousand dollars and your services. The ship is valued at ninety thousand dollars. There are no mortgages or liens of any sort on her. So it sums up that I am putting up ninety thousand dollars to your sixty thousand and yet I do not believe in a senior and junior partnership; it is better equal——"

Crandall interrupted him a bit impatiently.

"Up to this point you have been perfectly clear, but this discussion of equal shares leads nowhere—sixty thousand is my limit—it's all I have. That would give me a two-fifths interest—entirely satisfactory."

The other man did not speak for a minute, then again slowly he began:

"An unequal partnership is completely out of the line of my idea. If we were going into a venture, scores of which can be gone into along the water-front, some short-lived expedition, a partnership to be dissolved at the successful end of its rapid course, then I would bargain for the last cent that would be coming to me. Perhaps for more.

"I would be out for Dick Holt as I have been in the last ten years—pearling—sealing—a deal or two in guns, pretty much of everything that could be done on the sea, but this is no such scheme. As I have told you, it has long been in my mind to run the *Starlight* into a fleet, and it can only be done with a firm of her own operating her, moderate capital and a good man for the business end. I am a keen enough business man in a small way but a better sea-captain.

"I need you and your sixty thousand dollars, not to help me make a fair living, that I do alone now, but to put me solidly on my feet, to found a permanent established business. You for your part can get the same advantages. And I want you as an equal partner—fifty-fifty—profits, risks, all."

Crandall reached down by the side of the table and lifted the bottle from its brightly nickeled bucket. He refilled both glasses, then looked at the captain and said:

"To Holt, Crandall & Co. Bottoms up!"

Both men drank and shook hands across the white cloth and in this manner, headlong into the vast shipping business of the world, unnoticed, not even despised, came the little one-ship line.

THE days and weeks that followed were days and weeks of enthusiastic, cool-visioned work for both men. Each fell smoothly into the particular duties that were his share. Each had had long experience, varying fortune, and so had gained patience and foresight, and enthusiasm ran strong, for they knew the struggle that lay ahead, that had already had its beginning.

John Crandall spent most of his time in the firm's neat, modest little office, high in the same building that housed the great ship-lines and their Buenos Aires agents; the Munson Line of America, the Lamport & Holt Line of England and others of the vast links in the sea-chain that fed the growing commerce of the Argentine.

Often late at night it became the captain's habit to call for Crandall at the office, and together the partners would walk briskly down the Avenida de Majo, turning out at the great museum and from there down

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to the docks. A short row by a boatman, and they would climb the battered sea-ladder of the *Starlight*. In the soft moonlight, with the delicate lines of her booms and bridge standing out black against the lighter shades of the sky, the old ship took on a beauty, a charm that never failed to move the admiring and enthusiastic Crandall to expression.

"Dick," he would say, "just a minute before we go into the stateroom; man, man, she's a wonder."

And Dick Holt would laugh and scoffingly remind his partner of her daylight appearance, cluttered decks, greasy stevedores and perhaps the coaling session, and then he would add a bit wistfully—

"The old girl is real; she's splendid; she's ours."

If the nights were particularly warm, the captain often had a table brought out on the wing of the bridge and a couple of bottles of beer, and together the partners sat and gazed quietly around the harbor with its lights; lights of ships coming wearily into anchor and rest, lights of ships bravely heading out for blue water, lights of ships quietly at rest by their docks.

A deep, steady sense of security, of calm content, flowed into the heart of each man as the *Starlight* swung gently in the slack of the tide. Quietly, carefully, truthfully, they reviewed the activities of the day and plans for the days to come and slowly, steadily the ship was made ready for sea, and the office ashore was made ready to operate her.

So came the time when the six days' loading was finished, and standing by a capstan on the dock, John Crandall watched the *Starlight* move slowly out into the stream. Inch by inch it seemed to him she drifted from the dock and then suddenly she was a hundred yards out, then she was downstream, and the figures of the pilot on the bridge and the first mate forward, busy with the lines, grew a little indistinct. Then he saw the captain walk clear out to the wing of the bridge and look aft straight back at him.

Crandall raised his one arm and in answer the captain ran to the wheel and lifted his hand. Then came a puff of steam and three deep blasts of the *Starlights's* whistle, and so the captain said good-by in the proper manner of a respectful seaman to an owner.

THE *Starlight's* maiden trip under the house flag of Holt, Crandall & Co., started pleasantly enough. She was laden with a straight cargo of mixed grain, bound for Barbados, Martinique and Saint Thomas in the Virgin Islands, to return with a miscellaneous cargo from those ports. The crew, a pick-up crowd of West Indians, Greeks, half-breed Spaniards, and among them an enormous black from Martinique proved to be a surly ship's company, though efficient enough in the routine work of the sea.

The captain spent most of his time on the bridge, pacing steadily back and forth port to starboard, thinking, planning the steps of the next few years. And the days of sunshine and blue seas with the gentle trade squarely behind them blended into the man's mind until it was as tranquil as the sea, as steady, as promising.

What measure of success had come to Dick Holt had been gained by forcefulness, steadiness of mind and judgment and an extraordinary mixture of daring and complete recklessness. He aimed high. His romantic past showed it, although he would have laughed in derision at any one finding romance in his wild hand-to-mouth climb from beach-combing to ship-owning.

As he paced the deck of the *Starlight*, just one hint of worry, more like a shadow of apprehension, disturbed the quiet of his mind, as the perfect mirror of a still pond is clouded by a breath of wind ruffling the surface at a distant point. He did not dodge the fact or even look at it vaguely. He faced it squarely, admitted its existence and cursed his lack of caution:

"That's the sort of —— stupidity that will wreck me some day. I'm a fool."

He glanced aft and saw a fireman—it was the big Martinique black—carrying the chief engineer in his arms, grinning over him as a nurse croons to a baby. The fireman pushed open the cabin door of the engineer's stateroom and disappeared, coming out a minute later, alone, and going down the passage through the door leading to the engine-room well.

Gloomily Captain Holt stared aft down the passage and clenched his lips as the chief engineer lurched out of his stateroom with a white pitcher and walked unsteadily aft, to sit and drink with the cook.

About this man centered the misgivings of Holt. Primarily the man was a weakness

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in the ship. A drunken chief engineer, be he ever so efficient and capable, can in an emergency become a weakness. But even this danger can be lessened, can be largely overcome by constant watchfulness. Deeper than this, in the captain's mind, came the realization that old Williams' presence on the ship was a direct weakness in himself, Holt.

As captain of the ship and the trusted partner of Crandall, he was not true to the interest of the firm in risking his ship because compassion, a natural leniency toward the weakness of others, friendship, bade him keep the old man on. Pacing the bridge now, Holt reviewed his rescue of old John Williams. It was a rescue in every sense of the term, for if ever a wreck had been hopelessly tossed ashore, spent, battered, on the beach, then John Williams had been in the same manner cast ashore, without strength, without hope.

Holt had extended himself to the limit in a vicious rough-and-tumble fight, had conquered three men and been badly beaten before he had won to the open, out of a water-front dive in Port au Prince, carrying with him John Williams, an American, a ruined engineer with a blackened reputation.

From a mixture of motives—economy, compassion—Holt signed the man on the *Starlight* as assistant engineer. The old fellow made the last real fight of his life and keeping straight, became chief engineer officer of the ship. After a year his grip slackened and then he became sick of his old sickness.

Holt helped, encouraged, forgave. But now with the sea-destiny of the new firm in his hands, he realized that the old engineer must be dropped. It was unfortunate; it was inevitable; it was life. He would ship a new engineer at the end of the cruise.

That night as he went to his stateroom, before going to bed, the captain looked at the barometer and stared thoughtfully at what he saw. The cabin mess-boy, Angelo, woke him at six in the morning and as was his custom at sea Holt went up on deck for half an hour's walk before breakfast. The mate came hurriedly to his side, but not before the captain had thrown a quick glance about the ship and the sky.

The sun was completely behind a mass of dense black clouds, clouds so thick-looking, so closely packed, that they gave an impression of actual solidity. The towering mast of the *Starlight* pierced them, as the masts of a ship pierce a fog that is lifting. The horizon seemed to have moved close about the ship, to be a vague blending of black sky and dull, slate-gray sea, and there was no wind, just a complete calm. The ship seemed imprisoned in a circle that grew ever narrower.

"Veree bad storm, sir, veree soon," said the mate. "I have made the sheep ready for it."

Holt nodded.

"It is times like this, Mr. Rodriguez," he said, "that make steam sailors glad that they are on a full-powered vessel. On a wind-jammer we should be nervous; the sky is something fierce."

There was real pride in his tone as he banged his fist on the side of the wheelhouse.

"The *Starlight* will slam through this weather when it comes. The engineer department—" he broke off as a faint misgiving returned to him, a thought of the chief engineer.

THE calm continued through the morning, then without warning the storm broke; unless an angry white line of wind and water rushing down on the ship could be considered a warning. Certainly it gave no time for consideration. The *Starlight* met the first blow head on and passed through it without a tremor, steady, undisturbed. Captain Holt, standing by the wheelman, laughed as he felt the wind strike him, then his smile faded as he made out distinctly a peculiar high-strung humming pitched above the rush of the wind.

"Gosh, this is going to be real," he muttered.

He ordered the boatswain to whistle for the ordinary seaman on watch. Thoughtfully then, he watched a young boy struggle forward from the after-deck. The sailor's movements were grotesque. His arms moved about, flailed wildly as the wind tore at them. Holt noticed the sailor's cap suddenly disappear. There was no sight of it on the wind. The blue tam-o'shanter suddenly was not there and the flaming red hair was there. Doubting that the boy could make the bridge, Holt leaned far over the rail and shouted down to him through a small megaphone—

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"Ask Mr. Williams to come to the bridge at once."

It was a full ten minutes before the sailor was literally blown into the wheel-house through a door that proved impossible to close after him. Panting, the sailor gasped:

"Mr. Williams is asleep, sir. I could not wake him."

Not a sign of the wrath that filled the shipmaster's mind appeared on his face or in his voice as he nodded and bade the seaman stand by on the bridge.

Two hours later the *Starlight* was heading into seas that smashed over the bows with a solid fall of hundreds of tons of water that shook he ship with sickening power. As the humming in the air at the beginning of the storm had told Holt of the intensity of the wind, so now these unending blows, crash after crash, making the ship vibrate from stem to stern, told him of the danger of the seas far beyond the menace of ordinary rough seas.

And yet if things went right the danger was only potential. The ship was full-powered—was meeting the terrific wind and sea head on—was fighting through it, and Holt grimly realized that she must keep on heading into it or go down. To ship one of those gigantic seas even on the quarter would swing the old ship so that the next wave would send her broadside. There, hurled into the trough of the sea, she would be swept, sunk like a tin kettle.

Holt frowned as he thought of the chief engineer, drunk in his berth, frowned blacker as he thought of the assistant engineer, young Jackson, untested, a youngster who now had to face the supreme test of the sea and who would have but the one test. Failure in this crisis meant the end.

The awfulness of the storm, the terror that it brought to bear on the crew's minds was increased by the complete darkness that enshrouded the ship. She seemed to be moving through solid water, wind, rain, sea, jumbled together, inseparable.

Without warning, without sight, out of the impenetrable blackness, would come upon the bow a blow, a blow that shook the ship, that made her shudder, that buried her nose deep into the sea, and before she could lift and shake herself clear, another sea would crash down on her.

But she was stanch and her engines kept on driving, and down below in the engine-room young Jackson tried to reassure himself with the thought that it was all in the day's work and that he must not think of anything except steam.

Now and then he would peer into the fire-room, stare grimly at the two firemen; a Greek, sullen, mean, treacherous, the huge Martinique black, simple, impassive, possibly faithful. Partly to bolster up his own waning courage young Jackson would yell—

"Give 'em ——, boys!"

And without hearing it, the Martinique black always laughed and shoveled and the Greek snarled and shoveled. The glare from the open furnace door shone on the vast arms and shoulders of Jacques, the black; arms and shoulders smoothly, tirelessly doing their work. The man swayed easily to the pitching of the ship. The Greek cursed as time after time he lost his footing and went down before the furnace door. He hated the Martinique for his efficiency.

CAPTAIN HOLT, at three in the afternoon, believed that the pinnacle of the storm's strength had been reached. At half-past three he knew it had not. A faint light, seemingly extending only about the ship, was the only hopeful sign. She was still meeting head on, blow after blow, shock upon shock.

At four o'clock Captain Holt went below and drank a full glass of Cuban rum and returned immediately to the bridge. He looked aft and unbelievingly stared across at the boat-deck. Perched high on the side of a life-boat, hanging to the rusty iron davit with drunken strength, the chief engineer leered out into the storm. It was unbelievable that he could keep his hold even for a moment. Through cupped hands Holt called—

"Hey, you Williams, come down out of there!"

His voice seemed to stop at his lips. Making a megaphone of one hand and holding on to a ventilator with the other hand and arm, again he shouted with all his might—

"Jack, come down!"

Perhaps the old man heard him; probably he only saw him yell. Then the captain saw him distinctly, sickeningly totter on the edge of the life-boat and disappear. It was as if he had simply walked through a curtain, but Holt knew that the old fellow had plunged into the sea.

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He rushed out to the port extremity of the bridge and wrenched at a life-belt. It came loose after a hard tug and he flung it far out over the rail and, turning to run back to the helmsman, was struck a staggering blow by some heavy object. A huge sea, black, hollow, awful, crested with just a straight gleam of white foam, broke over the bow of the *Starlight* and tons of green water swept over the forecastle head and drove straight aft and upward, sweeping the bridge with a vicious white strength.

The captain grasped the rail with both hands, twisting his head about to dodge the cut of the water. Then, dumfounded, he reached down at his feet and picked up the life-belt which he had hurled overboard and which, blown back by the wind, had struck him.

It lay where it had jammed under the rail. This time the captain struggled with it far out on the wing of the bridge and flung it straight down the ship's side. A faint show of white, just a gleam, showed him where it had hit the water. Then he ran back to the wheel.

Not more than half a minute had passed since the engineer had gone into the sea. Before another half-minute passed Captain Dick Holt presented a problem in its entirety of himself, weighed the motives of the two possible decisions, the consequences that would follow each, and decided abruptly, finally.

The old engineer, his friend wastrel, drunkard, must be abandoned for lost. He probably had gone down like a stone; was dead already. Meanwhile the ship must be saved. To put her about broadside to the impossible seas was to lose her. Not a question of heavy risk but a fact of certain loss.

Crew, himself, the joint fortune of himself and his partner in the new line—all would be lost and the engineer could not be saved in any event. The adventurer Captain Dick Holt so decided, grim already remorseful; the shipmaster Dick Holt so decided; the business man Dick Holt so decided; but the man Dick Holt fought his way to the engine-room telegraph, clanged the signal and pressed his ear to the tube.

"Yes sir," came up a faint whisper from the engine-room, "this is Jackson."

"Captain speaking," shouted Holt. "The ship is going about. Tell the men to stand by for a heavy roll."

Then he grasped the wheel, shouldering aside the terrified West Indian. Steadily he turned the spokes and the ship shudderingly, reluctantly answered and then a vast black mass of water crashed broadside on to the ship. She rolled over, over, thirty degrees, forty degrees, what did it matter? Virtually the *Starlight* was under water. Then three more seas struck her, overwhelmed her, pushed her over, sucked her down and the captain had just one thought: steam—second engineer Jackson on duty—must keep up steam. This was his only thought and he never knew that his lips were howling into the wind, "—— that drunken engineer; he wasn't worth it; he wasn't worth it."

Down in the engine-room the youngster, Jackson, was in a rage, a very comprehensive rage, embracing the captain, the ship, himself for a fool for ever shipping on her and twice a fool for staying below to drown like a rat.

"I'm going up," he muttered. "She's bottom-up now. Can't run engines upside down."

The same thought must have taken hold of the Greek fireman for the clatter of a heavy shovel, evidently flung down on the iron floor, came from the fire-room, and into the passage came the Greek on the run—the firing abandoned, out of the trap, to the deck! Jackson grinned, a cold grin, a nasty, low, happy grin, and flung himself straight at the Greek. The floor-plates sank away beneath their bodies as the *Starlight* again heeled over. Hissing steam leaks and the harsh rumble of a rolling ash-bucket made words impossible. Jackson's fists, feet and teeth made clear his disapproval of the Greek's desertion of his post. His fists, feet and teeth made clear his intention that the fireman should return to his post.

The shovel thrust into the fireman's hand completed the lesson and again two firemen side by side were feeding the fires. Jackson, breathless, a little sick, gave a mighty blow on the broad, naked sweating back of the gigantic Martinique black. The big fireman showed a flash of teeth as he smiled at his officer. Behind the grin was the truth: he, Jacques, the big black, had stuck to his job! His flash of a smile vanished as he snarled at the frightened Greek:

"*Sacré Bleu!* Shovel!"

The Greek heard nothing but he saw the convulsed, lowering face, black, grotesque,

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indescribably menacing, and he shoveled sullenly, wildly. Back at his post again by the engine-room telegraph, Jackson gave a sigh of relief as he waited for another roll that never came.

"She's gone about," he muttered. "What's that madman Holt up to? Deck officers are all crazy anyway—just a degree above sea-cooks—never could compare to the engineer's force—example—look at the way I just smashed that mutiny. Sorry I can't tell the Old Man all about it but—" he sighed heavily— "it would look bad for the department. I wonder where the chief is; drunk most likely. I hope the old bum gets swept overboard."

IN ANSWER to the clanging of the telegraph he called up through the tube—

"Jackson speaking."

"Captain speaking, Mr. Jackson," came the faint sound. "The chief engineer was washed overboard. I put the ship about to look for him—will give you five minutes' warning before she goes about again. Bad seas."

The haggard face of the youngster worked queerly as he recalled his words of a minute before, "hope the old bum gets washed overboard."

"The poor old chap," he whispered. Then he rushed into the fire-room, yelling at the Martinique black:

"Steam, steam, plenty of steam! *Comprenez?*"

He pointed wildly at the dial between the boilers.

"*Bien*," said the man, "plentee of steam."

And the muscles rippled on his vast arms and back as he flung coal into the tiny furnace door.

In blind fear and wrath, unexpressed because they feared Holt as much as the storm—he had a gun strapped to his leg now—the crew huddled aft in the companionway leading to their forecastle. The heavy iron door of the port passage was closed but the starboard door had given way under the wind and the men were up to their knees in water, wet, miserable, mutinous.

Four times they counted the ship going about; four times they counted her lost, and then they sent a spokesman forward to remonstrate, to demand that the search for old Williams be discontinued. With a backward sweep of his arm Holt knocked the messenger to the deck.

"Get the —— off the bridge," he yelled—then to the man at the wheel— "Silva, port your helm, hard over," and again for the fifth time the ship faced her fate, fairly, squarely for a man that the captain knew in his mind was dead, was better dead than alive anyway, but who had been his friend.

A fifteen-minute headlong run before the seas and the mate came to the captain's side, tried to make himself heard, could not force his words three inches through the wind, gave up the effort and pointed straight forward. The captain, with his hands cupped over his eyes, stared out into the tumbling wastes ahead and saw plain, distinct, unmistakable the life-belt, and in it, made fast some way with his armpits over the edges, was the old engineer. Coolly Holt took over the wheel and changed the course slightly, just two degrees, until he had passed the old man, then he rang the telegraph and called down to the engineer—

"Am going about again—found—will stop ship; stand by."

Again the battered, stripped *Starlight* swung about and hung quivering, trembling, as the engines stopped. By some queer twist of the inscrutable forces of wind and sea, as the ship slowed down, the surface of the sea flattened, perhaps under a fiercer thrust of the wind.

The waves were still as terrible, the rolling as violent, but clearly the sea had lost just a small part of its viciousness, a hardly to be noticed difference, and that small part saved the ship. In the lee of the high sides of the *Starlight*, splendidly handled as Holt had never handled her in his long command, the man, found but not yet saved, floated on the long swell. He appeared unconscious.

"Quick, lad," cried Holt to the boatswain. "Bear a hand, men. The bosun will go over the side on a line. Be ready to haul both aboard."

As the man, snatched from the sea, the line made fast under his shoulders, with the boatswain holding to the loose end, was pulled on board, the crew broke into a feeble cheer, a very weary, uncertain cheer. It was hushed as the captain bent over the old engineer, stretched out on the deck at his feet. He straightened up, faced the men and through his blistered, swollen lips came the word—

"Dead."

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That was all. Again below the telegraph clanged and Jackson leaped to the steam lever as the hand swung around the dial to slow ahead, half-speed ahead, full speed ahead. The roar of steam, the grinding complaint of the engines were deafening as the ship slowly gathered way; the rolling diminished, stopped, as she headed into the seas and again began her regular pitching. Cursing, laughing, a bit of song on his lips, the impulsive assistant engineer danced in the bedlam of sounds.

"Found—saved—good old chief engineer. My ——, what a skipper!"

Then through the tube came the captain's voice, cold steady, tired:

"Splendid work, Mr. Jackson; you and your men. Mr. Williams was hauled aboard —dead. Ship in bad shape, returning to B. A."

And the song on the boy's lips died and he looked down at the greasy floor-plates, and stared at the embossed pattern, and into his ears, unexpected, uncomprehended, came a faint sound of music. Again he saw the New England school—again he sat in the chapel, listening to the white-clad choir—again he heard the boyish voices, deep basses, swelling sopranos and shrill altos in the wonderful harmony of youth and faith—

"Guard the sailors tossing
On the deep blue sea."

He shivered and spat into the bilges.

JOHN CRANDALL since the *Starlight* had been ten days at sea, had been a very uneasy young man. The sudden cessation of wireless reports from the ship, which had been relayed as she got beyond the range of her outfit, was disconcerting, especially as a spectacular storm, the worst in years, had been verified in the waters he knew that Holt was steaming through.

His work served well in helping him to turn his back on worry, but lying in his hotel room at night, with the bed moved close to the window where he could see the twinkling ships' lights wide-flung over the harbor, he went over and over again the possible answers to the mystery. One thing of course was clear, a fact that even a landsman could know. The *Starlight's* wireless was out of commission. And that might mean anything.

Then one warm clear morning on the steps of his office building an English shipping-agent grasped his arm and told him that his ship was entering the outer roadstead—that she had reported to an incoming tug the loss at sea of her chief engineer, and that she was returning under her own power for needed repairs.

At two o'clock he saw with a catch in his breath a gaunt, broken ship, stripped of life-boats, the starboard wing of the bridge gone, with two of the forward booms broken off short, slowly limping up the harbor. A heavy list to starboard told of a shifted cargo. Then as a tug took her to her anchorage, Crandall was already on his way out to her, urging on his boatmen.

As he came over the side he saw the owner's flag hoisted to the truck, then by the head of the sea-ladder saw his partner, Captain Holt. They shook hands and went at once to the captain's stateroom. Without introduction of any sort Holt reported briefly, simply the loss of the chief engineer, that he had judged it his duty to put the ship about in an attempt to rescue him, and that she had been strained and hurt by the maneuvering.

Temporarily the *Starlight* was unseaworthy; for technical reasons, for necessary repairs he had put back to Buenos Aires. In a month she would be fit for sea. She required installation of an entire new wireless outfit. He finished.

As briefly, as simply, Crandall assured him of his approval of the report. The captain's face seemed lifeless, bleak, worn. A faint gleam of interest, a trace of enthusiasm lighted it as he pressed a bell over his bunk. The mess-boy answered after a rather long wait.

"Angelo, tell Mr. Jackson that I would like to talk with him here."

"You remember John Jackson, my second engineer. He has been acting chief since the accident. I intend to send him up for examination and confirmation of his rate. I need him as chief engineer of the *Starlight*. You will understand just what I think of him—Oh, come in, Jackson. You've met Mr. Crandall. We've been discussing your berth on the *Starlight*."

There came a knock on the door and Angelo came in.

"The pilot is leaving, sir," he said.

Holt turned to the two men and said:

"I shall leave you two for a few minutes. I want to see the pilot before he goes."

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After he had left the room John Crandall turned to the young engineer and said quietly:

"Jackson, I am not talking to you as your owner but as the friend and partner of Dick Holt. Tell me what he did out there."

Jackson's face flushed. A little doubtfully at the start he floundered along, giving mere events, then something in John Crandall, something trustworthy, something loyal, melted his reserve and out came his enthusiasm, his wild, pig-headed, unconsidered enthusiasm for the Old Man of the *Starlight*.

"——, oh ——," he ended in a whisper, "he's big!"

The door slammed behind Jackson and Crandall was alone with his thoughts. He tried to concentrate his mind on the percentage of insurance the company would get; the adjustments to be made to shippers, but somehow in the foreground of his mind was the picture of the battered old *Starlight* and commanding her, the Old Man on the bridge.

Later at dinner in the Café Colon, at the very table where they had formed the partnership, the big captain seemed singularly ill at ease, not at all himself. Then at the close of dinner John Crandall, dumfounded, unbelieving, listened to the sheepish speech of a child; a disjointed sort of speech. A lot of it was run together and lost whatever meaning had been intended.

Through the maze of it all, one idea alone persisted, that—while Holt did not regret, not in the least, his course in maneuvering the ship—in risking her for the slight chance of rescuing one man—would do it again—rule of the sea, a —— good rule—still he could understand that perhaps Crandall would feel that a partner more cautious, more business-like, would be safer and—well he was willing to clear out in that case——

He stopped abruptly, staring out of strained bloodshot eyes into the calm face of the shore-partner, who returned the look steadily and said:

"Dick, beyond a bare approval of your report, briefly given because I am not an emotional man, I have avoided commenting on this first rather unfortunate voyage. But once and for all I tell you now that never in the growth of Holt, Crandall & Co., which I believe will be founded on strong, straight deeds, never will a more real single-hearted, decent thing be done than when, in the words of your kid engineer, 'the Old Man hollered down the tube, "The ship is going about; stand by for a heavy roll!"

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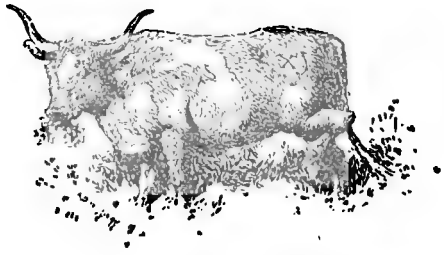
REYES of ALTAR



By E. E. Harriman

Author of "Missionary Bill," "Paying His Debt," etc.

REYES of Altar carried in his veins the mingled blood of more poisonously vicious characters than would damn a modern Sodom. He inherited his name from a murder-expert in the train of Cortez, but Aztec, Apache and Congo nigger had all contributed to the muddy current. There was family tradition to support the belief that a Portuguese courtezan had spilled a solution of devilishness and Moorish taint into the mixture. A slight, almost indefinable something about his eyes hinted at a touch of Mongolia.

Immoral in every fiber, cruel to the last, tiniest drop of blood, untruthful, treacherous and revengeful, Reyes of Altar ruled and held faithful the men of low estate below the line. He was a fighter, a daring, wily thief, a disciplinarian of a sort, and he fed his men.

"Why do I follow Reyes of Altar?" repeated one when questioned. "For a *panzada* three times a day. Before I followed, my *panza* lay flat against my spine. Now it is of a roundness and my belt never grows slack. For that I would unhinge the gate of —— and fight the devil in his own *casa.*"

The women who tagged the band of Reyes prayed under their *rebozas* to San this and San that for the preservation of Reyes of Altar, as they saw the little bare bellies of their strutting *muchachos* grow rotund. The strange women, who watched the band come and go, joined in the prayers while they gathered up the unscraped bones and scraps of meat left behind. Only the stockmen cursed when the smoke-wreaths rose from barbecued meats below the line.

Reyes had come north over that border one day when he was young. For two long years he rode the ranges as a *vaquero*, learning all he could of trails and fords and gringo ways. He raced south at the end of his service and four proselytes rode with him, easily converted. The gringo stockmen raved as the dust-clouds rose and spiraled in the light whirlwinds across the border, for a hundred fat steers went with Reyes. Loudest raved Bill Haley of the Cross J, late and longest employer of Reyes, for where the Bar B and the Lazy H had each lost one buckaroo and ten steers, the Cross J had made enforced contribution of three men and fourscore steers.

"I trusted that —— wolf," said Bill. "He made a crackin' good cowhand and he was top rope by a mile. Worked faithful an' was always smilin' an' all the time jest a-layin' fer me. Come across the line fer nothin' else but to get a line on how to rob us safest. If I ever git him lined up with a Winchester I'll show him some of the fanciest shootin' ever done in Arizony."

South rode Reyes of Altar and joined himself to a mushroom general who made loud boasts of freeing the peons. He had no reputation as yet that would warrant him in assuming a title. That would come to him later. So for two years he rode and pillaged for another, as one of many. Then the mushroom withered and another sprang up.

Now Reyes of Altar bore the title of colonel and had a ragged, cutthroat crew of mounted thieves under his command. He was given a free hand and a roving commission. The raids across the border grew more frequent, the losses much more serious. The stockmen on the northern side began to meet in consultation.

Then Reyes of Altar and his gang called

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once more on the Cross J, broke down the little white rail that enclosed the grave of the original owner, old Fred Jurgins, killed the Chinese cook, stole his pots and pans and cooked their meal hastily from a yearling they caught near by and rode away before the punchers knew of their presence. Sheer cruelty and disappointment over having missed his haul, owing to the old man having moved his cattle north the afternoon before, where the feed was better, made Reyes mistreat a lone steer.

His bandit gang had routed out a big spotted three-year-old from where he lay in the shadow of a rock, a deserter from the herd. Bill and his foreman, Tom Dowling, found the steer where the gang had left him, close by a little trickling spring. A keen knife had ripped the skin and taken out a section of one muscle. A little fire, hastily kindled, burned feebly below the shriveled, crisping flesh that was stuck upon a bending slender stick.

For once old Bill was dumb. He stood beside his horse and his eyes took in everything, the weakened, bleeding steer, the sizzling flesh, the trampled ground. For two long minutes Tom Dowling waited action from his boss. When it came it made the eyes of Dowling glow with admiration. Such wealth of invective, such richness of superlative he had never heard, though he had lived from babyhood in the cow country. He listened in silence, awed and staggered.

"Shall I kill 'im, Bill?" he asked, his Colt half-drawn, when Bill stopped to gather wind.

The gray old boss shook his head.

"No. We'll patch him up an' make 'im our mascot. Let 'im run the range till he dies of old age. He'll keep me reminded o' what I owe that skunk Reyes an' some day I'll pay in full."

TWO months elapsed before the steer could travel with any ease and then he used that hind leg much as a man uses a wooden peg. He found great difficulty in rising, getting to his feet with a lurching plunge that always carried him far forward. Bill would watch him at times with his eyes very hard and bright. His blistering speech immediately following such observation met the hearty approval of every puncher. There was no sickly sentiment around the Cross J, but neither was there any condoning of needless cruelty.

"Give it up, Bill," said Tom one day. "You've got the ——est fine flow of words in two languages west of El Paso, but you kain't do it justice. It ain't possible in less'n four."

"——! I wisht I knew a dozen. I'd cuss that Reyes out in every one of 'em an' study combinations. I'd like to set Reyes afoot at the end of a twenty-foot rope, with his hands tied an' the steer at t'other end. I'd like to bed him down on cholla cactus fer a two weeks' rest. I'd like to give 'im a honey bath an' stretch 'im on a ant-hill.

"Mebbe he'd learn to treat a cow-critter decent then."

"But you wouldn't do ary one of them things an' you know it," said Tom. "I'll admit he deserves it all an' I feel like handin' it out to 'im, but a white man just can't. Come to the scratch, you'd shoot or hang 'im an' so would I, but you kain't make me believe you'd ever git down to his level an' copy 'im."

Bill made no reply, for he knew in his heart that Tom was right, yet his spirit seethed every time he saw the spotted steer with a game leg. There was no lessening of his rage as time passed. The wanton act of useless savagery against the steer had burned a scar on Bill's temper and that scar was supersensitive.

Again Reyes raided across the border and swept the fringes of many great ranches for fat steers. The Cross J came in with its quota and hoped that they had heard the last of Reyes for many a year. Alas for the calculations that are based upon the actions of a human wolf. The raiders were back within two weeks and relieved the Cross J of another bunch of white-faced steers.

"Tom, tell the boys that ary one who gits more'n a hundred yards from the bunkhouse without his artillery is fired. We've gotta be ready all the time. We're goin' back to old times when a gun was jest as much a part of a man's outfit as his rope. Tell 'em."

Raid followed raid and the Cross J lost steers, broomtail broncs and cowponies. It acquired an occasional case of lead-poisoning, as the boys called it, but nothing fatal. In return for such small favors as a punctured arm or leg, a scalp-wound or an abbreviated finger, some cowhand would come ambling into the home yard, leading a strange horse that bore an unmistakably

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south-of-the-border saddle, with a Mauser hanging on the horn. Another boy in wide hat would glance up and drawl, "Git 'im?" and the careless "Yep!" of the first man would close the conversation.

"Red" Billings carried off the palm for surviving the most injuries, since a raid in which Reyes led happened to come his way and Red put up a fight all alone.

Reyes had attended to Red with a .38 in a .45 frame, after Red had fired his last shell. Feebly Red declared himself immune to lead-poisoning, while the doctor plugged four holes in his anatomy, and made good by recovering completely.

"Danged if I care," said Red. "I got three that can't be patched."

Then Bill and Tom mixed it with a bunch on the east line and mourned because it was commanded by a subordinate.

"Never mind, Bill," Tom consoled his boss. "Reyes will come again."

"I hope to God he does," said Bill, wearily. "I rid hard in hopes him an' me could tangle today, but he never showed up. Tell the boys they's a —— good saddle, the pick of Cross J hosses an' a thirty-day spree at full pay fer the punch that hogties Ramón Reyes."

"They's indictments out agin 'im fer murder in Cochise an' Santa Cruz Counties an' four in New Mexico, besides Texas wantin' 'im bad. He's doin' more killin' than ever this year. Kills his own men fer any little thing that makes him mad. He's gone killin' crazy, I figger," said Tom. "If them cholos had any grit they'd wipe 'im out."

"Not as long as he gits plenty beef," Bill replied. "The Mex thinks it's a —— sight easier to raise beef by raidin' than it is to breed it. They pack their brains pretty —— close to their digestion, an' hearts went out of fashion with 'em when Cortez let his hellions run loose down there. Reyes may kill a few men that run with 'im, but that goes as discipline. He don't risk losin' his popularity none by that."

"I kain't understand them cholos," remarked Tom thoughtfully.

"If you could you'd be right in line fer ambassador to Mexico City er somethin' better," said Bill. "Might git a job as advisor to the President. I hain't never knowed anybody all white that did understand 'em. Thought I did once, but I don't no more."

"I should think Reyes might be a leetle mite discouraged over what happened today, though," said Tom.

"Think it discourages a flea to get shuk out'n a shirt? Jest hops on the next feller an' goes right to bitin', don't he? Well, Ramón Reyes is jest that kind of a flea. He'll hop to the Bar B an' across to the Lazy H an' right back to the Cross J, bitin' as free an' cordial in one place as in the other."

Bill paused and scratched his big nose thoughtfully.

"Failin' to git the beef an' losin' three *trampistas* ain't goin' to set him back none worth mentionin' a-tall. He won't never quit his mean tricks till he's amusin' the kiotes an' fattenin' the buzzards. I gotta hunch he's usin' some *paisano* amongst our own lot as a spy or else he's sneakin' a lookout over the line to do signalin'. We gotta look a little out fer them things."

"I know it, Bill, but it 'ud be a big job to rake all them hills east of us fer spies. They's more'n a dozen stands up like Calf Hill an' gives a good view. A spy might come across an' hide out among them brush easy fer a week or ten days."

"That's so, Tom. By godfrey! I've a —— good notion to ride them hills myself. I'll take them old field-glasses o' mine an' see if I can see anythin' suspicious. String the boys out kinda casual, but where they kin git action right quick in case I start makin' war-medicine. Tell 'em to keep one ear open fer the ol' howitzer an' come a-bilin' if she yells more'n once."

"All right, Bill. What *caballo* you goin' to fork fer th' day?"

"Yeller Jacket. That danged *canalo* kin stand more poundin' sand an' scufflin' through rocks than any other in the cavayard. Besides, he hain't had much work lately an' it'll do him good to hustle."

"What time you want 'im ready?"

"Daylight. An' I'm goin' to ride no'thwest till I'm outa sight."

Tom nodded, understanding the strategy. He left Bill and went to see that everything was running properly around the ranch.

AT DAYLIGHT next morning old Bill swung into his saddle and sent the yellow horse out to the northwest road at an easy lope. Soon he had slowed to a fox trot and pulled his loosely knotted bandanna over his nose. Any

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observer would have judged him to be out on a long trip through the dust. The nearest town by this road lay twenty-three miles away. Ergo, he was going to this town.

Two miles from the home ranch he cut a bush-filled draw that lay nearly east and west. The road curved around the shoulder of a low ridge just beyond. Bill swung sharply east and a watcher would not have known from the rear whether he turned in the draw or beyond.

The draw led him back among the hills and he crossed from draw to draw by way of bush-covered slopes till he had left the home buildings far to the southwest. He jogged slowly southward then, still keeping out of the open and below the sky-line.

When he had reached a point almost due east of the buildings and about a mile distant, he guided the yellow horse up a wrinkle in a ridge and stopped him where horse and rider were both hidden. Calf Hill raised its brushy crown a hundred feet above the plain about six hundred yards west by south of his position. Other lesser hills appeared to right and left of Calf Hill. Bill deliberately adjusted his battered old glasses and scanned every hill and ridge within his view. Not a sign of life anywhere.

He dismounted and sat down with his back against a rock and his legs stretched out luxuriously. Across his lap lay the old gun. Half an hour later he arose and again searched the hilltops and the ridges for signs of life. Three times he repeated this without a result worth the trouble of standing. The fourth time he had run his gaze along the top of Calf Hill, carefully scrutinized the lower levels and was about to sit down again. He paused in his turning and his eyes scanned Calf Hill once more.

"I coulda swore I see somethin' flash," he muttered. "There it is again! Now what——"

He put the glasses to his eyes and looked long and carefully. He made out the hams of a black horse standing in the clump of tall bushes and little trees on the crest. The saddle was empty.

"Clumb outa his saddle jest then an' the sun flashed a *concha*. That's the lookout spyin' to see where a bunch o' steers can be had easy. Jest wait a bit right where you're at an' I'll show ye a sample o' stalkin' that'll take the conceit out'n ye. Jest lay low an' watch t'other way fer one minute, while I git Yeller Jacket down to level goin', an' I'll thank ye kindly."

Bill walked and led his mount till he had reached level land and good cover that would hide him till he had traveled halfway to Calf Hill. Then he swung into his saddle and sent the yellow horse over this part briskly. When the cover ceased and he had to take to the open he took it at a high lope, making a line that would carry him diagonally south of the hill. He saw a man mount the black when he was still a hundred yards from the base of the hill and start down the west slope.

Bill came out past the hill in time to see the black slide on his haunches down the last sharp pitch and start off on the level with a good hundred yards the advantage. Bill pumped the old gun and sent three bullets zipping past the fleeing man. They kicked up the dust well ahead of the fugitive and Bill knew he had held to the left. Well, it was fair shooting for that style, holding under the elbow and working at speed. It would summon help and the boys would head the black. The rider under the *sombrero de palmo* let go with a Mauser, half-turning in his saddle, and Bill heard the whine of the jacketed bullet past his ear.

He set his jaw grimly, shook up Yellow Jacket and replied in kind. Presently he had to shove more shells in through the loading-gate and his ears caught the rattle and patter of firing far over to the right. The black horse, he soon saw, was curving off toward the sounds of battle and gaining slightly on Yellow Jacket.

Bill looked across the plain and saw nothing of what was going on over there, since a rocky island rose between, just high enough to cut his line of vision. The rocks rose too abruptly to cross them on horseback. The black horse would round the southern end well ahead unless he could stop him. Bill hated to do it, but he must stop that fellow and he began to shoot at the horse. A bullet struck at the right, almost even with the rider. The next one went far ahead. A running horse is no aid to marksmanship.

The black turned quickly to dodge a rock and Bill sent a bullet under his belly. A little higher and the rider would have dismounted without ceremony. The sides of Yellow Jacket began to feel the rowels and he lengthened his stride and quickened his recovery.

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The black had rounded the rock island in the sea of sand and was out of sight. Bill sent Yellow Jacket around in a scurry of flying dust and straightened out behind the racing black. There was no manner of doubt about the nationality of the rider. He was a son of sin from south of the border, dark-faced, perfect in horsemanship and absolutely reckless. He tipped his sombrero back, faced about to shoot and Bill got a good view of his face. It was Reyes.

"Git, you old hound! Pick up your feet! Yip-yippee!" Bill yelled as he drove the rowels in. "Hi-yi-yippy-i-ay!"

Yellow Jacket laid his ears tight to his neck, champed his bit noisily and laid down to his running. He opened and shut like a grayhound and the distance grew less between him and the black. Bill lost his hat and his gray hair streamed back in the breeze. Reyes no longer galloped at ease, but leaned far over his horse's neck as he urged it to greater speed.

Twice the gun roared and the dust leaped far ahead of Reyes. Then Bill carried it at a ready and waited for closer range.

The country was open now and free from brush and trees. Here and there a rock heaved up a huge bulk like a turtle-back. Now and again one stood high and swart, like an aboriginal dwelling, indeterminate in shape. Reyes swung to take advantage of as many of these as he could, riding to bring them between his back and the rifle that had a hoarseness. Now and then pursuer and pursued threw lead again.

The interval had shrunk to eighty yards and the yellow horse, angry now because he had been roweled hard, was cutting this down slowly and steadily. Bill lifted the old gun for another try and this time he meant to take his time, make sure and end the race.

The stock touched his shoulder, the muzzle wavered with the motion of Yellow Jacket, the sights fell into line before the grim blue eye and the finger began to tighten. Now the shifting front sight touched the black horse's rump, swung a little higher, shifted from side to side, steadied for a split second and the old finger closed on the trigger. Yellow Jacket stumbled.

The bellow of the big gun came just that fraction too late that tells the marksman that he has swung off the target. The next instant it plunged muzzle first into the sand and Bill Haley shot over it in a spread-eagle plunge. Yellow Jacket followed with a crash, but fortunately canted a little to the left and missed his rider. Reyes looked back and laughed.

Already he was checking the black and swinging him in a turn to make sure of Bill. The old man rolled to his knees, jerked his gun from the dirt, struck the barrel against a small stone to shake the sand out and fired at the bandit almost with the same motion. The black swerved in a reverse curve. Reyes had no notion of facing Bill when the old man was on solid ground and able to handle his Winchester. Instead he would make sure of escape.

Bill sent three more shots after him without result and then he danced with rage and shook his fist after the vanishing wretch. A moment more and he would be safe and Bill grew purple with rage. To think that he had been so near to getting the murderous, thieving Mexican and then old Yellow Jacket had to fall and ruin his chance.

He called down seven kinds of damnation on the bandit and not less than four on a splay-footed, hammer-headed, yellow-hided, yellow-souled horse that couldn't keep his feet under him. He lifted his rifle, raised the peep sight for six hundred yards, aimed and let go at his enemy. It was a guess and a good one. The bullet must have sung close, for Reyes ducked and his horse whirled to get one more of those large rocks in line with his back.

"Missed him again! Oh, ——!" roared the old man, casting his gun violently from him and throwing his hands above his head. "—— the luck an' —— the buzzard-bait that throwed me jest when I had him lined! Did any man ever have sech ——nable luck! Here I—eh? What's happenin' now?"

HE STOPPED his raving, stared for three seconds and then scrambled for his gun once more. He swung into the saddle and rode as fast as Yellow Jacket's shaken condition allowed.

He had seen Reyes ride to put himself under the protection of a huge rock. He had seen him pass around its shoulder and disappear. Then he had seen a dust-cloud rise suddenly above that rock.

"Bet a hoss he got throwed jest like I did," he declared, urging his horse to

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greater speed. "Mebbe I kin git a whack at 'im yit."

Half-way to the big rock and he had not seen any signs of the bandit's progress. He swung a little to the right to look past the rock. No rider appeared anywhere on the plain. The only living thing in sight was the spotted steer with the bad leg.

Bill rode around the rock with his rifle cocked and ready for a quick shot. On the sand lay the black horse, his skewed head telling plainly of a broken neck. Beneath the horse, in a posture that told of a hasty dismounting, lay Reyes, caught even as he was escaping.

Bill's keen old eyes read the sign, the tracks of split hoofs, the sliding, plunging marks that told of hasty rising in his crippled way by the steer, the knee-marks he had made between the last hoof-prints of the black and the place where his skull had dented the ground.

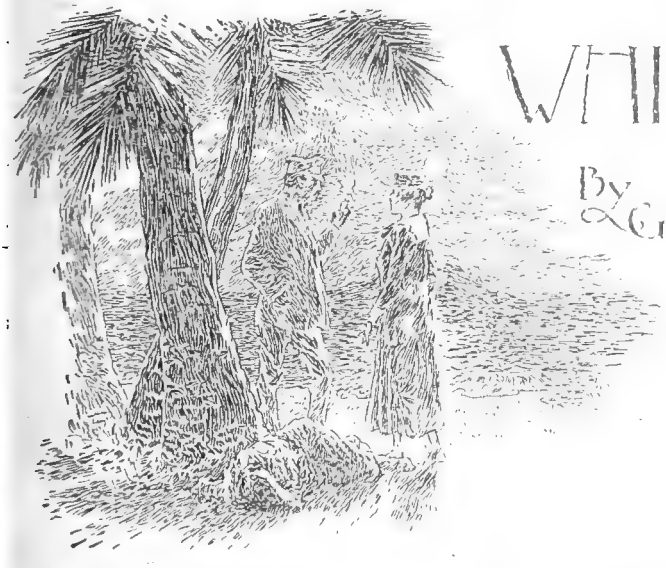
It was plain as daylight to Bill.

"Surprized the steer an' he plunged to git up an' away. Run his head an' neck right under the black an' throwed him over onto Reyes, when the Mex hopped off to save bein' chucked off. —— if it ain't what that old parson in Prescott called 'righteous retribution' if anythin' ever was. I takes my hat off to Providence."

Bill made the motion of removing his hat and remembered that he had lost it long ago. Then he went to work to roll the dead horse off the insensible bandit. Three of his men came riding, having followed the sounds of battle, and they took charge of Reyes.

Bill backtracked till he found his hat and then jogged home.

They hanged Reyes four months later in Cochise County and he proved his mongrel blood by wilting and having to be carried to the scaffold. The steer graduated from the open range to alfalfa pasture and there he lives today, fat, contented and sleek, well away from the bandit-belt. Bill Haley still talks of how his spotted steer lay for a bandit and got even with him.



WHITE EYE

By Garrard Harris

TRADE-WINDS, cooled by two thousand miles of sapphire Caribbean waves, died away to nothingness and *el terral*, the refreshing land-breeze from mountains looming vastly inland had not yet begun. Meanwhile San Juancito sweltered and stewed in humid heat.

Myriads of mosquitoes from mangle thickets along the banks of Rio Hondo descended upon the inhabitants. Nibbling of fleas and sand-flies became more pronounced. In the dead calm a raucous, clacking chorus of tree-frogs in the swamp bordering *Calle Independencia* and from plantain clumps about the houses swelled in irritating volume.

At the point where Rio Hondo flowed into the little Bahia de la Paz was situated the corrugated-iron custom-house and the

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rickety pier—chief glories of San Juancito, principal port of the Central American Republic of Amititlan.

The main article of export—bananas—came down Rio Hondo in great dugouts hewed from mahogany logs, on rafts, and small boats of every vareity. Owners of craft bought the bunches at *fincas* in rich sheltered valleys up the river, and at San Juancito sold to the fruit company. In port, when assembling cargo, the green bunches were piled upon lighters, then towed to be loaded on the steamer, which, owing to a sand-bar at the river-mouth, anchored a mile out.

Two days before a steamer was due to arrive, small craft swarmed down the river loaded to the gunwales with fruit; then hastily returned to the plantations for more. These days were the harvest time for those men of San Juancito who willed to work at unloading, stacking, passing and stowing aboard the steamer. Pay was only one *sol* a day—forty cents, measured by *oro Americano*—but forty cents in Amititlan was equal to a couple of dollars in the States.

The piping, inefficient whistle of the customs-launch was sounding, calling workers to the water-front. As the men, shoeless, attired in cotton trousers and jackets, with high home-made straw hats upon their heads, sauntered to the custom-house, there was one different from the others in two particulars only—he was a white man, and he wore a short golden beard.

He paused at the American Consulate, for the consul was standing on the small gallery.

"What steamer is due, sir?" asked the man hopefully.

The consul eyed him with disfavor.

"I don't know."

"Well, please, sir, won't you use your influence to help me get aboard as a member of the crew? I just must get back to the States—I've a fortune if I can make it to New York."

"Your conduct, Owen, has not been such that I can recommend you for anything. You have practically ceased to be an American—you live with these Spiggoties and to all intents are one of them. And there is your drinking——"

"I've explained all that, sir; and I would not drink if I could get away. It's the idea of being compelled to stay in this cursed place that nearly runs me crazy; and with not a soul willing to extend a hand to me. Just help me to get away, won't you please, sir?"

He was pleading desperately.

"No, I won't."

John Owen stood and stared at the consul's back as that dignitary stalked into his office.

"Well, all I have to say is that you're a —— of a representative of the United States. And looking at you I'm tempted to forswear my country and claim to be a Britisher!" called Owen as a Parthian shot.

The consul was a pedagogic, priggish young man of social and diplomatic ambitions, newly come into the service, and he was consumed with rage at being sent to the wretched post of San Juancito where, beside John Owen, there were three other Americans—and of the lot he particularly disliked Owen.

Mainly his animosity was due to instruction he had received from Miguel Fernandez, richest merchant of the place and viceroy of the Government of Amititlan on the Atlantic side. Fernandez had been gracious—kept him supplied with gifts of marvelous old Santa Cruz rum and Spanish wines that paid no duty—and invited him around to the house where Lolita made much of Consul Carstairs and practised English and vamping upon him.

"Those Juan Owen," advised Señor Fernandez at dinner one day, "he is one *sin verguenza*—without shame. He borrow from me one thousan' *sols* on the mine of *la plata*, the silver; an' now he do not give me tees mine he owe me; he do not pay me my *sols;* he dreenk it all up. He is what you say in *Americano* one 'damrascal.' You keep heem away Señor Consul—he make you much trouble!"

So Carstairs joined in with Fernandez against John Owen. He did not know the real reason why Fernandez went to the fruit-company agent and made a personal request that Owen be not employed even to carry banana-bunches; or his order to the customs officials to the same effect. Fernandez hoped to reduce Owen to such extremities that he would finally accept a few hundred *sols* more, sell the mine and show where those marvelously rich specimens of ore came from.

Thus it was, every ship-captain who called regularly at San Juancito knew John Owen, and knew that to employ him in any

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capacity would make for trouble with Fernandez. And Miguel Fernandez, as political power and representative at San Juancito of the shifty-eyed little yellow man in the presidential chair in the capital far beyond those purple mountains could stir up more trouble in five minutes than weeks could untangle or smooth over.

For instance; he would whisper in the ear of the port doctor, and the doctor could withhold health clearance for a ship indefinitely and cause the vessel to put into New York or New Orleans with fifty thousand bunches of overripe bananas aboard—a dead loss. Assuredly it was better to sacrifice John Owen than antagonize Don Miguel.

OWEN went down to the wharf and was curtly told by the fruit company agent there was enough labor employed, although he hired six two minutes later. The customs folk did not even take the trouble to speak; they pointed outside and Owen slouched away. The ship was the *Rio Chico;* she had been there many times before and there was no chance of a job aboard. In asking the consul the name of the vessel it was in the faint hope that it might be one whose captain did not know of Owen's bad name and of the malevolent enmity of the powerful Fernandez.

John Owen, discouraged, disheartened, humiliated, made his way back to the little *cantina* and lunch-house of Señora Josefina Ortiz, where he was allowed to sleep in the rear in return for his help with customers, his aid in negotiating deals with smugglers of bottled and other goods, and the small, irregular payments he made toward his board.

And mainly, to tell the truth, because Josefina was greatly smitten with him, which was a source of much embarrassment to Owen, who did not at all reciprocate. She was neither young nor comely and was the most notorious shrew in San Juancito; but it was that poor haven or nothing for him.

Occasionally, when cabled orders for many thousands of bunches of bananas came in advance of the ship, Owen could get a few days' work up on the *fincas* cutting and carrying and helping boatmen with their loads. These small earnings he turned over to Josefina on account.

It was understood between them that he was to have what liquor he needed, and this he took from stock. He had come so completely under the influence of the native rum that he could not get along without it. The cost was small, and Josefina was glad to pay the price for his assistance. True, he occasionally drank deeply, and at times went into the really expensive stuff, such as American rye and Scotch, but that also had been a failing of the late Señor Bernardo Calderon Ortiz.

Josefina accepted it as one of the immutable ways of mankind, and after one of these sprees she would shrug her shoulders, smile indulgently, roll another cigaret and accept his remorseful apologies without a word of reproach.

As John Owen retreated from the waterfront, he paused on Calle Independencia in plain sight from the *cantina* and talked to a comely Carib woman. Viewed from Josefina's door, he apparently was patting the woman on the cheek or chucking her under the chin. In reality he was examining a marvelous great jade bead the woman had strung on her neck.

Owen knew that jade—that it came only from the Kuen-lun mountain in Turkestan, and was bartered ages ago to the vanished Mayas by traders who came across the trade-route where the Aleutian Islands now stand, or perhaps by voyaging Phenicians. It had been washed out of some hillside grave and found by the woman.

Owen knew its value and that he could sell it at a good price to the president of the fruit company, who fancied such antiquities. Perhaps the trinket of some Maya princess of thousands of years ago might be the means of his escape—*quien sabe?* The Carib woman promised to see him later; no trade in the Tropics is concluded in one day.

Owen innocently walked on to the *cantina* and into a hurricane of jealous rage and shrill upbraidings from Josefina, who had witnessed, misconstrued, and would hear no explanation whatever.

A crowd of idlers began to assemble out side the door, listening joyously to the monologue; not often were there diversions in San Juancito. The audience stimulated Josefina to greater efforts; the Latin love of the theatrical responded nobly to the incentive. Finally she ordered Owen to leave *El Buen Gusto.*

"Certainly, if you wish—be half-way decent, can't you, and stop that squawking? It is entirely unnecessary!"

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With a pitiful remnant of dignity he strode back behind the rear partitions, sacred to sleep and cockroaches, and many, many fleas, where hung his scanty raiment.

While the clatter continued up front, Owen rolled up his rags, thoughtfully placing in the middle five quarts of *ojo-blanca*—"white-eye," the raw native rum of the country. It had become so necessary to his existence that to be deprived of a certain quantity each day brought horrible imaginings and shapes and things lurking at every turn and dogging his footsteps. When the five bottles were gone—well, after that, the deluge. Where to obtain more without money was a problem to be met when it came to be faced.

Josefina was up in front talking against time, waiting his return when, for the edification of the crowd, he was to be dramatically ordered out the door. Owen suspected as much. He was in no mood to have his feelings further butchered to make a San Juancitan holiday. He placed his bundle on the sill of the back window, vaulted through and vanished into a small thicket of plantains back of the house.

He emerged in a disused alley, then swiftly made his way into the woods. He reappeared far up the shore of the blue Caribbean, where a little spring trickled from a clump of coconut-trees some hurricane had bent out over the beach.

OWEN thoughtfully buried four of his bottles in the sand; the other he opened, took a soul-satisfying swig and a drink from the spring. Propping his back against a coconut-tree, he lighted a cigaret and began to experience that peace which passeth understanding of all who have not a steady campaign on hand to keep away those things which lurk in the borderland between sanity and drunkenness, when one's nerves have been shot to pieces with liquor for years. The hovering visitors faded into the background, vanished, and he began to think more clearly.

There was infinite relief at having the association at *El Buen Gusto* definitely ended, come what might. It had humiliated him many a time; but with no money, no way to earn it, no friends and no chance to leave, what else was he to do except remain, even though it was to sink lower and lower in the scale?

And always there was that cursed craving for liquor—and liquor cost money, except from Josefina. She knew he was compelled to have a certain amount, so she chained him with food and shelter and enough *ojo-blanca* to keep the things off him. He did not drink because he liked it. He drank because the liquor staved off those horrors, dulled the gnawing of remorse and shame; steadied quivering nerves and for the time rendered him tranquil. It was anodyne to the vultures of self-abasement and contempt which returned again and again to tear his vitals.

Owen was a mining engineer, twenty-five years old when he first came to Amititlan to work with the great silver and gold mining company over on the Pacific side. The reckless spirit of the tropics got into him, as it often plays havoc with young men from the North. He took to drinking more than he should, where almost everybody drank and nothing was thought of it as long as it did not interfere with one's work. Such is one of the attractive liberalities of life in the Caribbean countries.

As long as a white man sticks to Scotch, or maybe brandy, he does not lose caste. But let him be known as an addict to "white-eye" and he begins to slip in every way. The natives shrug their shoulders and make expressive gestures to the effect that all is over. The whites begin to avoid him and ignoring him, finally cut him dead.

It is a common axiom down that way that if a man takes to *ojo-blanca* he can never quit—that is, if he is a white man. The stuff is as insidious as absinthe, as devastating in its effects as opium. It burns out the finer sensibilities more quickly, reduces its devotees to brutish level more effectually than any other known beverage.

Owen came on the works one day showing he had too much liquor aboard. It was the third or fourth time. The superintendent sent for him and warned him that if it occurred again, Owen's return passage-money would be given him. Owen flew in a rage and quit, *instanter*.

He was glad of the chance, for a few nights previously in one of the *cantinas* he had taken to frequenting at unholy hours, rum had loosened the tongue of a *paisiano* from over on the Atlantic side. The man told Owen a fascinating and fantastic tale about a silver-mine of the ancients. Tradition said the wealth of Chichen-Itza, Copan

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and Quirigua, great dead cities of the vanished Maya race, had come from its fabulously rich veins.

Owen drew what was due him, sold most of his effects and with the countryman as guide, struck out across the backbone of the Isthmus to search among the lateral mountains branching toward the Atlantic, in the hope of locating the forgotten mine. There was no reason why silver should not be there—gold likewise to some extent in the silver ore. It was the same range of mountains, the same general geology as existed in the region where he had been at work.

Months were consumed in prospecting. The native did not know, of course, where the ancient workings were. There were traditions, and that was all. Nobody knew anything of definite value. But at length, in a remote, three-forked branch of the mountain-range at the point where the smaller ridges joined the Cordillera, Owen found traces of silver. His money was gone long ago, but he camped with a family of Indians.

He became as one of them. The fair-haired, golden-bearded young *Americano* was all but worshiped by the gentle, kindly natives. On the periodic trips eighty miles inland to the capital to sell deer-hides, tiger-skins, wild rubber, wild coffee and vegetable-ivory nuts, the Indian father and his two sons and their wives always returned with a supply of the cheap *ojo-blanca* because they thought their loved guest wanted it.

He worked in a desultory way, trying to develop the vein. Then he would come under the influence of the rum and for weeks at a time do nothing but dream of the wealth he would enjoy when the mine panned out. At times, in feverish haste he bent to his task and finally obtained specimens of ore, showing the mine would richly repay the installation of modern machinery. Owen then set out for the coast, hoping in some way at San Juancito to finance his trip to the States, where capital could be interested or the mine sold outright.

Miguel Fernandez readily loaned him a thousand *sols* on his note and a vague written statement that the mine "*La Esperanza*" was security. Owen began to celebrate while waiting for the steamer. When she arrived he had wasted and gambled every *sol* of it—together with his drinking, and the boat left without him.

He applied again to Fernandez, was cursed for a *ladrone* and shown the door when he refused sufficiently to describe the mine in order that Fernandez could seize it. Other merchants heard of Fernandez's experience and would not risk Owen for one *centavo*. He could borrow no money, save for Josefina, who would dole out a few *sols* at a time on his promise to pay when he sold the mine.

Thus he remained at San Juancito.

IT ALL passed in review through the mind of John Owen as he leaned back and gazed idly upon the iridescent bosom of the Caribbean. He watched the flocks of pelicans and gulls as they patrolled the waves; the small fishing-boats off the distant town and the great white banks of cloud above.

In the horizon far out a bunch of coconut-palms rose apparently out of the water. It was the *Isla del Muerte*—the Island of Death, the Carib Indians called it—a small rocky and sandy spot in some way connected with the religious ceremonies of aborigines of that region, so the story ran.

Owen took another drink. It was disquieting to review his failure, the gradual ebbing of his hopes, his manhood, his ambition, in the past four years. He waited for the liquor to react and bring more pleasant thoughts, but instead his mood grew more deeply sad.

From behind the coco-palms of *Isla del Muerte* slipped the steamer he had inquired about that morning. She would be there until late at night, loading. Owen was glad he was out of town; he still was sensitive about being pointed out to passengers who came ashore as Exhibit A in human depravity.

He recalled the time when he was waiting for that same *Rio Chico* steamer to take him back to the States—to the millions that only awaited his coming. Gone—all gone, never to return, an opportunity such as few lifetimes met. He felt utterly lost to all that hope had once dangled before him. There was nothing left but to vanish into the jungle; perhaps eke out a few miserable years with some Indians as one of them, and then—nothing more.

He again sought solace from the bottle, only to make his sorrow more poignant.

Owen gazed moodily across to the Isle of Death. It fascinated him, the idea of a spot set apart to those who were about to leave the woes and disappointments of this life.

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A place to await and greet the Great Adventure: to fare forth beyond the distant horizon where perhaps existence could be remolded, unchained by weaknesses of the flesh.

He had heard a Carib Indian of the coast once say that old, worn-out, useless members of the tribes were taken to the island and left there with a small supply of food. If hunger drove them to try to swim the five miles of water to the mainland, sharks invariably got them, and thus the tribe felt that death was upon the head of the reckless one. If the person died of starvation, it was proof positive that the Great Spirit wanted that person or He would have sent food, and so again the tribe was scatheless.

Owen could not keep his eyes off the spot. "The old, the worn-out, and the worthless—" that was also John Owen, his mind kept telling him over and over again. Not old in years but in sorrows and failures; and of a certainty worthless and worn-out. Partially dead already—dead to all of decency and heritage of civilization; dead to his family and to his self-respect; dead to hope and ambition.

The steamer blew for the customs officers in their absurd blue denim uniforms and no shoes, military caps and clanking sabers, their tarnished epaulettes and excess of pompous dignity. The sound swept in to him, sweet and clear on the rising breeze. She let go her anchor, swinging white and proud and disdainful of the collection of miserable palm-thatched huts and hovels, the few corrugated iron-roofed stores, the squalid disorder along the semicircle of the shore. A flock of lighters and boats dotted the water, going out to the vessel.

Purple shadows of the brooding mountains behind him had already reached far out into the bay. In the deep blue above floated idle white clouds, tinged with all the gold and splendor of sunset. Dancing whitecaps dotted the waters as the tide surged in and broke in long low rollers of emerald and creamy white. Gulls wheeled and dipped in the enchanted expanse. High in the air a flock of stately man-o'-war birds circled in long, sweeping curves.

John Owen drank again—but the liquor served only to clarify his mind and present more clearly the depth of his descent. He gazed at the rags infesting his frame, the bare feet, the unkempt beard upon his face —and loathed himself.

DAYLIGHT was dying in the west, when out of the water behind the Isle of Death the moon rose, majestic, hugely full, with the palms of that mysterious spot silhouetted against its ruddy face.

As the orb climbed above the island, its luminance made a crinkly path of molten, dancing silver direct from him to where the waving fronds appeared to beckon.

"A silver path, and it ends at the Isle of Death. My path; the path I have followed!"

He muttered the phrase to himself again and again as if it was some incantation.

Owen drank more and threw himself upon the sand, pillowing his face upon his arms that he might not look longer, lest he should plunge into those waters and try to reach that spot which obsessed his fancy.

How long he lay thus he did not know. A dull despair numbed him. The monotone of waves falling upon the shore soothed him and at length he dozed.

"Oh, is the poor fellow dead?"

A woman's voice, sweet, sympathetic, exclaimed just above him.

Rough hands turned him over until his face was full in the moonlight. For very shame John Owen kept his eyes almost closed and feigned sleep, for over him there bent the second officer of the *Rio Chico* who had kicked him off the boat not four months since. There stood near the man, and with the moon at her back, a young woman attired in white. The moonlight played in and through and about each separate strand of her golden hair until it made a halo of glory about her head. Her eyes bent pityingly upon Owen, and she clasped and unclasped her hands in nervous concern.

"No, he's only dead drunk!"

The second officer prodded Owen with his foot.

"I don't believe it; I think the poor fellow must be ill!"

She bent over him and touched his brow. It was dank with the cold sweat of weakness.

"Why—he's a white man!" she exclaimed, recoiling.

"He's got no right to be called white, the way he's disgraced his race. He's lower down than any of these here Spigs."

"Oh, isn't it a pity—isn't it a pity!"

She apparently paid no attention to what the second officer was saying. An angel sorrowing over a lost soul could not have been more compassionate.

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"He's a beach-comber, a down-and-outer. Old white-eye got him, and when it gets a white man he is done. They never can come back," chattered the second officer.

"The poor, poor fellow!" murmured the girl.

"Why, he's so low-down these natives won't hardly associate with him; he's hit plumb rock-bottom in human worthlessness——"

She turned upon the second officer in a flash of indignant fury.

"Who are you to be judging him? What do you know of the causes? How do you know but that circumstances forced him down?" Her bosom heaved as she fired the questions at the ship man.

The second officer tried to laugh it off. Then he took another tack.

"I've heard, too, that he comes of mighty good folks up in the States—college man and all that—belonged to some swell clubs and went out with the best, but he got to fooling with this *ojo-blanca* and it got him."

"I just feel so sorry for him I could cry right now——"

"Come on, Miss Laurens, we better be getting back; the *Chico* will have that fruit aboard pretty soon and ready to sail."

They started down the beach, walked a hundred yards, and the woman paused and turned.

"Wait a minute!" she commanded.

She returned and bent over the prostrate form and crumpled a bill into one of the limp hands and touched the cold forehead with finger-tips.

"Good-by, poor man—and good luck to you!" she said in a low voice.

Then she hurried down the gleaming sand toward the harbor of San Juancito where the vessel lay like some scintillating jewel afloat upon the waters.

She was the first white woman who had spoken to John Owen or been near him in five years. She was the first human being who had felt for him in all the time of his descent.

He did not look to see the denomination of the bill; he watched until the silver haze enfolded her. Then he rolled over, prone upon the sand, and sobbed like some child in a tempest of unutterable wo.

He had seen her clearly; he had heard her every word. She was the most beautiful thing his eyes had ever beheld; the most womanly, the most tender and compassionate.

Dim ambitions stirred beneath the avalanche of sin and sordid days which buried the real man; ambitions to be back where he could stand straight and look such women in the eyes; where he could walk upright as a man and not slink; where he could pay his way and ask no odds. Ambitions that he could aspire to such as she.

They broke from their living tombs back in his brain and came trooping to the battle; they joined forces in twos and threes; they came in companies and phalanxes. One towered far above all the rest and led them.

This ambition was girt as Gideon. It was to raise from the dirt, the rags, the filth and the depravity this present wreck of John Owen. Then, somewhere, some day, to find that woman and do homage for the miracle her woman's heart and pity and tenderness had wrought.

The idea exalted him. It grew with the passing hours, long after the *Rio Chico* had vanished into the opalescent distance, until the moon was low in the west and streamed another silver path direct toward the *Isla del Muerte*.

ALL night since she had come he had not taken a drink. In the first gray dawn he gathered a few mangoes and with spring-water made his breakfast.

There came paddling along the beach-front in his big mahogany dugout old Carmelo, a Carib Indian, who was searching each clump of coconut-trees for ripe ones that had fallen. Thus day by day he accumulated a little store of them to sell. John Owen hailed him and handed him the twenty-dollar bill.

"Take this, Carmelo; go to town and buy me enough food to last two weeks. Obtain also a large cask for water and return here. I will give you three *sols*. I wait here. And you know nothing of me. *Sabe?*"

"*Sí, señor; yo ssê.*"

The honest old Indian returned about eleven o'clock and counted out the change to the last *centavo*. The cask was filled at the spring and hoisted into the boat along with the provisions. From his cache Owen dug up two bottles of *ojo-blanca*. The sea was calm as a mill-pond.

"To the *Isla del Muerte!*" commanded Owen, taking seat in the dugout.

"Oh, no, *señor;* it is bad there. *Los espiritos*——"

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"I'm going to see those spirits. Take me!"

"But I am afraid——"

"I will give you this bottle—and three *sols!*"

Carmelo wavered at the sight of the rum.

"I will protect you. You can return at once. *Los espiritos* are only there at night. Come, let us go before the water gets rough."

Carmelo took a hearty pull at the bottle to give him courage. Shoving the dugout from the beach, he paddled furiously.

They landed the water and supplies, and Owen carefully placed his one bottle of rum on the sand. He procured Carmelo to take his *machete* and cut off the ends of innumerable green coconuts so that with the aid of his pocket-knife Owen could open them as desired and drink the refreshing juice. Then he paid the old Indian and gave him two more *sols*.

"Take one of those *sols* and ten days from now buy a little food and bring a jug of water and land at this spot. If I am not here—look—by this tree I place three more *sols*. They will be yours for your trouble. Swear you will come."

Carmelo made the sign of the cross.

"I will be here," he answered.

Then he shook John Owen's hand and headed his craft away from the haunted island.

THE reaction came. From the peak of resolution John Owen fell into an abyss of doubt. His hands shook as with a palsy. A million quivering nerve-ends clamored for their dose of quieting alcohol. His lips began to parch, his eyes to burn. Strange fragmentary whispers sounded in his ears. If he turned to answer, the whispering shape would shift suddenly to his other side, so as not to be discovered.

"Just one drink out of that bottle—just one big one, and you can have peace; you can sleep and fight a much better battle. Take it gradually; don't punish yourself so!"

The sibilant waves seemed to iterate it over and over again; the wind in the palm-fronds gave it echo.

He shambled to where the bottle lay upon the sand, pounced on it, fumbled in his pocket for his knife to draw the cork.

Then he flung the bottle as far as he could out into the waves and crumpled to a heap which went into queer jerkings and writhings and groveling upon the beach.

It was dawn of the next day when he staggered to his feet and drank water from his store. There were marks of his teeth upon his wrists and hands and forearms. His finger-tips were caked with blood where nails had bitten into flesh. The fires of Avernus consumed him. He forced down a bit of food and drank more water and coconut-juice. Then he stretched out in the shade.

A sleep came upon him, troubled and unrestful, full of weird shapes and voices and uncanny happenings. He toiled up impossible cañons toward the light above, only to slip and fall, down, down, down, past worlds, past everything, to the profound depths of utter space, only to begin the process all over again.

In late afternoon he came out of the coma, drank more water and essayed to walk about, for he could not be still. His nerves were screeching again for their dose. The tide had come in and gone out, and as he made his weak, rickety way along the clean-washed sands he stopped in amazement.

Before him lay the bottle of white-eye he had flung into the sea the night before. Some lurking devil of the depths had rolled it back up on the beach to damn him!

"Aha, you've returned, have you? You almost got me last night, and now you think you can come back and win?"

Owen was talking aloud to the demon in the bottle as if it were a living thing.

"Very well then—you want a finish fight—a fair fight to the end? All right—all right—come to it!"

He carried the bottle to where his store of provisions was placed. Food—he needed food to give him strength to fight, and he realized it. He forced himself to eat although it almost choked him. He stuffed his stomach with quantities of food and coconut-milk and fell into a gorged doze.

In the early night he woke. The moon had risen. He was trembling and parched. Every fiend he had ever served was urging him to drink of the liquor; every fear that tortured mind could conjure as *avant courier* of unnamed and unfathomable horrors lurking in the shadows urged him to drink and preserve his reason.

Misty, spotted and slimy shapes began to cling about him as did the serpents on Laocoon, who had also profaned the temple.

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With inarticulate cries John Owen fled the writhing shade of palm-fronds, the constrictor shadows of misshapen tree-trunks. He rushed out on to the moonlit beach.

He ran backward and forward and around the little islet until he stumbled and fell from sheer exhaustion. He lay, panting, bathed in sweat and trembling violently. At length he grew more calm and was astonished to find he had the bottle in his hand.

Would he never get away from that temptation?

Again the devastating thirst came upon him.

He placed the liquor a little distance from him, opened his knife and laid it beside the bottle. Then he sat, crosslegged, and contemplated his enemy. It would be but the task of a half-minute to draw the cork and drain the flask at one draft.

But, he resolved if he did that, the next moment he would slash the arteries in his wrists.

He sat, immovable, unblinking, for hours and hours. The fiends in the glass beckoned and called and whispered to him to take the drink; then end it all and go out with the tide to that dim Aidenn just beyond the purple rim of sea, where there would be peace and surcease of sorrow.

There rose memories of his boyhood, the hopes and brave ambitions of his college days. There rose the picture of his mother —dead long ago—and somehow he felt that she was with him, looking upon him with an infinite compassion and tenderness as did the girl in white upon the beach.

He remembered the prayer his mother taught him at her knee. It was the only prayer he had ever learned, for in his later pride of intellect he scoffed somewhat at prayers. But he lurched forward and with clasped hands and eyes fixed upon the Southern Cross swinging low on the horizon, his cracked lips mumbled those words of long ago he learned as a little child

Memories surged upon him. Head on arm he lay upon the sand and tears again blinded his eyes.

Sunlight waked him. He sat up dazedly and it all came back to him. He had made the fight, straight out, and he had won! An exaltation filled his soul.

In the succeeding days there was no desire for liquor. Daily baths in the surf, the eating of ripe coconuts and drinking the milk and abundant sleep gave him strength and restored his nerves. When on the tenth day Carmelo came, John Owen joyously awaited him.

"Señora Josefina has men looking everywhere for you. She prays much at the church and weeps that she drove you away," said the Indian.

"She did me the greatest kindness of my life. See here?" He held up the untouched bottle. "I will never be its slave again!"

"It is a miracle of the spirits of those brave Caribs!" said Carmelo, crossing himself.

"Come, let us get across. I have much to do. Here are your three *sols*."

LANDING by the spring, John Owen bundled the food he had, swapped the three untouched bottles and two *sols* to Carmelo for his *machete*, the long, heavy sword-knife so indispensable in the tropics. Then Owen plunged into the woods, headed for the long-neglected mine, miles and miles inland through trackless forest.

His Indian friends greeted him as one risen from the dead. He inaugurated a feverish activity; he gathered a few more Indians and paid them from the remnants of the twenty dollars, for twenty dollars converted to *sols* at forty cents goes a long way in Amititlan.

The end of the vein was in a gulch against a sheer cliff. He had no rock-drills; he could get no blasting-powder or dynamite, for the little yellow *presidente* of the Republic feared to allow explosives to be imported lest some enemy blow him up.

An old, old Indian showed John Owen the traditional way of mining ore as he had heard it from his forebears. A roaring fire was built against the side of the vein and when the exposed rock was red-hot, water was dashed upon it. It shivered and shaled and cracked and fell in small showers. It was a slow process but sure, and the farther flame and water ate into the vein, the richer it showed.

John Owen and his Indians picked over the ore, and those pieces heaviest with metal were sorted out and shivered in the fire again. Kilns of charcoal were started, and the helpers kept the fire against the cliff going day and night.

Great round flint stones from the riverbed were used as pestles and the women and old men pounded the richest specimens of

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ore to a fine powder. So laden with virgin silver was some of it that bits of the metal were mashed flat into scales in the process.

A crude furnace was built by Owen, with bellows made of deer-hides. In small clay crucibles the pounded ore was placed, these bedded in glowing charcoal, and the air-blast turned on. Silver melts at nine hundred and seventy degrees, and the molten particles gradually percolated to the bottom and formed buttons of the pure metal.

Slowly a store of silver was accumulating. When there was sufficient John Owen made the trip to the capital with his Indian friends and there, selling some of his stock, obtained ample funds with which to file his claim to the mine and pay his passage back to the States.

He divided a portion of the silver with the Indians, but took with him a good store of it and some of the specimens of ore. Giving permission to the Indians to continue the work on a share basis, he made his way to the Pacific side and caught a steamer upward bound to San Francisco.

JOHN OWEN returned in due course with some men of capital and celebrated mining-experts, who came and saw and marveled. After exhaustive tests the party made ready for return.

At San Juancito John Owen paid Fernandez in full and with interest. He sent to Josefina full board for the time he had lived at *El Buen Gusto*, paid some other trifling bills and gave old Carmelo a twenty-dollar gold piece.

Back in New York, the business arranged, a whaling cash balance in bank and contracts for a royalty which made him rich beyond the wildest dreams he ever had, John Owen waited the return of the steamship *Rio Chico*.

He pushed aboard and sought the second officer.

"One night last year you walked upon the beach at San Juancito with a young woman you addressed as Miss Laurens and you found a man named John Owen on the sand——"

"Yes. Say, that blamed beach-comber did come back and they tell me he has made millions out of a mine——"

"That is true. I am John Owen."

The second officer could only gape and stare.

"I will overlook your uncomplimentary references on that occasion—they really helped wake me up—if you can tell me something of that young woman. I have never forgotten her or her kindness."

"Well, sir; that's the oddest thing!" said the second officer. "Fellow named Newman just got off this boat—came up from Lima, Peru, said she was down there in Lima dead-broke and the American consul was trying to help her, but there was mighty little he could do, on account of the indictments against her here for those confidence-games she was mixed up with. She and her feller were getting out of here on that trip when we saw you. And this feller of hers—Wilcox—he got stuck on some dame from over in the Argentine and skipped out from Lima with all the kale and left Lenore flat broke. Even swiped her jewelry!"

John Owen looked across the muddy waters of the East River and his heart felt as cold as one of the lumps of ice in the current.

The very bill she gave him was won by crime! She for whom he had toiled back the long, long slope from hell itself was——

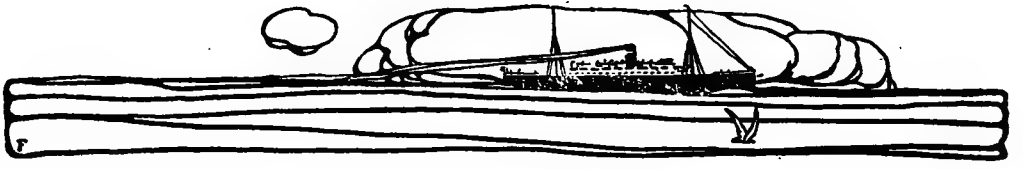
He leaned on the rail moodily, lost in abstraction.

"Was there anything else, sir?" inquired the second officer.

"Yes; where's the cable-office?"

"Right over yonder."

The second officer watched John Owen walk straight over and enter.



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The HEART of the RANGE

A FIVE-PART STORY—PART II

By William Patterson White

Author of "Lynch Lawyers," "Paradise Bend," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

RACEY DAWSON, after a drunken spree in the Happy Heart Saloon, awoke with an aching head on a side-hill. He made a startling discovery that the horse upon which he had departed from the Happy Heart was not his horse, and straightway he rode to the blacksmith-shop to solve the mystery.

There Racey was still kept in the dark, for the smith and even "Kansas" Casey, the deputy sheriff, took the "horse-rustling" as a joke. But none would tell Racey who had his horse or whose horse he now rode.

Certain feminine articles in the saddle-pocket led Racey to inquire of Miss Blythe, keeper of the Blue Pigeon Store, and she identified the horse as that of Miss Dale, an old maid who lived with her parents, new residents of the cow-country, on the Dale ranch.

Before he went there to swap horses, Racey, in a Chinese restaurant, quarreled with a burly youth over a yellow dog that the youth apparently was trying to steal from the girl lookout of the Happy Heart. They went outdoors and gun-play ensued, and Racey, quicker on the draw, shot the youth in the shoulder. Then Racey went into the Happy Heart.

When he came out, two men were examining the spot where the shooting had taken place—Lanpher, owner of the 88 ranch, and a good-looking stranger. From their conversation Racey knew that a plot was afoot to dispossess a certain old "Chin Whisker." He also learned that several other cowmen were in the plot, including Luke Tweezy, a notorious lawyer.

While Racey was riding away, the girl of the Happy Heart, whose dog he had protected, rode up and informed him that the burly youth whom he had "plugged" was "Nebraska" Jones, leader of the Currycomb crowd of gunfighters. Nebraska would surely requite that shot, she said.

When he rode to the Dale ranch to return the pony, he found that the "old maid," Dale's daughter, was a pretty young girl. But before he exchanged the pony for his own mount he warned her of the plot afoot to dispossess her father. While he was talking with her, Dale came in drunk. Racey, inspired by the pretty Miss Dale, was determined to play a high hand in the game between Dale and the plotters.

CHAPTER VII

THE RIDDLE

"E'D oughta closed with Jack Harpe last night," said Swing Tunstall, easing his muscular body down on a broken packing-case that sat drunkenly beside the posts of the hotel corral. "What's the sense o' puttin' things off thataway, Racey? Now we'll lose two days' wages for nothin'."

"I had a reason," declared Racey Dawson, threading a new rawhide string through one of the silver conchas on his split-ear bridle. "I wanted to talk it over good with you first."

"Whyfor? What's there to talk over, I'd like to know? Why——"

"Because," interrupted Racey, "there's somethin' up, if you ask me."

"What for a reason is that?" demanded the irritated Swing. "That ain't no reason, no good reason anyway. I'm tellin' you flat, y' understand, that so long as we gotta take root here instead of goin' to Arizona

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like we'd planned it out—so long's yo're gonna renig on the play like I say, the best thing we can do is string our chips with Jack Harpe's."

"That yore idea of a bright thing to do, huh?" questioned Racey, his nimble fingers busy with the rawhide.

"I done told you," said Swing with dignity.

"Poor, poor Swing," murmured Racey as though to the bridle's address. "The —— forsaken young feller. It must be the devil an' all to go through life in such shape as he's in. All right in lots o' ways, too. He eats like a hawg, drinks like a fish an' snores like a rip-saw, so yuh can see there's somethin' almost human about him. But he hasn't any brains, not a brain. He never has anythin' on his mind but his hair an' a hat. Yep, she's a sad, sad case. Lordy, Swing, old-timer, I feel sorry for yuh. Yuh got my sympathy. I'll always stick up for yuh though. I won't let——"

"This here," cut in Swing, "has gone far enough. If you got anythin' to say, say it."

"I been sayin' it. Ain't it sunk in yet? Hand me that ax, an' I'll make another try."

"Stop yore fool lallygaggin'," Swing exclaimed impatiently. "Le's have the whole sermon. ——, yore worse'n a woman! Gab, gab, gab! Nothin' but. C'mon, tie the string to the latch an' slam the door. This tooth has been achin' a long, long while."

"It's thisaway, Swing," Racey said soberly. "There ain't no manner of use goin' into somethin' we ain't got the whole straight of."

"What yuh talkin' about—the straight of?"

"Yep, the straight of. Don't you see nothin' funny about this jigger's offer?"

"Looks like a fair proposition to me. Fifty per, shore listens well."

"As if that's all of it."

"Well, what's a li'l fussin' round with Bill Barbee an' the Anvil folks?"

"Nothin' a-tall, that ain't. But the li'l green pea ain't under *that* shell. Listen here, Swing, old-timer, I got a long an' ghastly tale o' wickedness to pour into them lily-white mule ears o' yores. Yep, if it wasn't me a-tellin' it I'll bet you'd think it was a fairy-tale."

"I might even so," said the skeptical Swing. "But I don't mind. I'm good-natured today. I feel just like bein' lied to. Turn yore wolf loose."

"WHAT do you feed it on?" inquired solemn-faced Swing when he had heard Racey to the bitter end.

"Feed which on what?" demanded the unsuspicious Racey.

"Yore imagination."

"Say, lookit here——"

"Yeah, I know—oh, aw right, aw right, I didn't go for to make yuh mad. I believe it. Every word. Yo're gettin' so —— touchy nowadays, Racey, they's no livin' with yuh. I swear they ain't. Why, if a feller so much as doubts one o' yore reg'lar fish-stories yuh gotta crawl his hump. Aw right, I believe yuh. How big was he again?

"Ugh-h-h! Uncle! Uncle! Get off my stummick! I said 'Uncle,' didn't I? —— it all, that left ear o' mine will never be the same again. You rammed it into a rock with more points than a barb-wire fence. Nev' mine no more foolin' now. Are you shore you got Peaches fixed for three-four days? 'Cause if you ain't—pop goes the weasel."

"This weasel ain't gonna pop. Not this trip. Peaches will stay put. Don't yuh fret. By the time he does drift in we'll know all we need to know, I guess."

"We," sniffed Swing. "Did I hear you say 'we'? Ain't you takin' a awful lot for granted?"

"Shut up. I couldn't keep you out of this with a ten-foot pole. Yo're like Tom Kane thataway—always wantin' to get in where it's warm. Aw right, that's settled. Lookit, we know there's some crooked work on the tow-path goin' on, an' that Lanpher an' Harpe are in it up to their hocks. We know that Nebraska is one of Harpe's friends an' we know that after my fuss with Nebraska, Harpe comes to you an' me an' offers us jobs—jobs at fifty per, wages to start when we say when, an' no work for a while, yet we're to stay round town till he wants us to start in.

"An' he talks of maybe a li'l trouble in the future with Bill Barbee an' the Anvil boys, an' he mentions Bill and the Anvil several times, an' the last time wasn't necessary. An' furthermore he don't say nothin' a-tall about this Chin Whisker gent, who's old Dale or I'm Dutch. So there y' are, an' plain enough," added Racey, holding up the bridle and turning it about.

"From what Harpe said to Lanpher we know he's bound to get old Dale's ranch

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come —— or high-water. But he don't say nothin' about that to us. No, not him. It's all Bill Barbee an' the Anvil, an' he's as friendly as a dog with fleas. His actions don't fit with the facts an' when a man's actions don't do that they'll stand watchin'; him an' them both."

"Fifty per ain't to be sneezed at."

Swing, whose heart had been set on Arizona, was not prepared to give in without an argument. Besides, he invariably objected on principle to anything Racey might see fit to do. Which was humanly natural, but more than maddening—to Racey.

"Shore not—unless it sets us against our friends."

"What yuh talkin' about?" persisted the wilfully blinded Swing. "Neither Bill Barbee nor the Anvil outfit are any friends of mine. I don't even know 'em to speak to."

"But I tell yuh it ain't Bill Barbee an' the Anvil, you wooden-headed floop. If it was them, why would Lanpher be in it? An' Nebraska? An' Thompson? An' Peaches Austin? I dunno exactly what it all means. But whatever it is it's gotta do with the country round Farewell—with the ranches on the Lazy. Aw right. Besides Dale's an' Morgan's there's three ranches, ain't they, on the Lazy near Farewell?"

Racey Dawson held up three fingers, doubling a thumb and forefinger behind them.

"Three ranches," he continued, "an' the manager of one is in cahoots with this Harpe of many strings." Here he doubled down his pinky and waved the remaining two fingers in the face of his friend. "Two ranches are left, the Cross-in-a-box an' the Bar S. Jack Richie is manager of the Cross-in-a-box. I used to ride for Jack an' he's my friend. You dunno him, but you can take my word he's the pure quill forty ways.

"Then there's the Bar S. Who's foreman o' that? Tom Loudon. You worked with him up at Scotty MacKenzie's Flyin' M ranch on the Dogsoldier, an' I've knowed him ever since I come to this country. I ain't doin' nothin' to make me bad friends with Tom Loudon. Then there's Dale, this Chin Whisker party. He's a good feller, an' had a heap o' hard luck, too. I ain't workin' against him, yuh betcha. Nawsir. An' if I don't miss my guess you don't either."

"Aw ——! They ain't no rat in that hole. Yo're seein' a heap o' smoke where they ain't even a lighted match. I don't wanna do nothin' against either Richie's outfit nor the Bar S, nor old Dale, but I ain't satisfied——"

"You ain't! Good ——! Ain't I been tellin' yuh? Ain't I been explainin' of it all in words of one syllable? Can't you see Harpe's tryin' to pull us in with him is just a trick to get us shot by our friends? 'Cause his jumpin' old Dale's ranch will shore start a war, an' you can gamble it's just as dangerous to be shot by yore friends as it is by a enemy. Here I'm tellin' yuh over an' over an' you ain't satisfied yet! I've heard of fellers like you, but I never believed it was possible. Like the whiffle-tit, they was just a —— lie. But it's all true. Swing, old settler, if you had a quarter-ounce more sense you'd be half-witted."

"If I had a quarter-ounce more sense I'd quit you cold like that."

So saying, Swing Tunstall rose to his feet and shuffled a guileful step or two closer to Racey. The movement of his right arm passed unnoticed by Racey. But the lighted cigaret that, following his movement, slipped down Racey's back between his shirt collar and his neck did not pass unnoticed.

Racey hopped up with a sharp exclamation and shucked himself out of his shirt with the utmost dispatch. He did not stop at the shirt, but tore off his undershirt likewise.

"Better luck than I hoped for," Swing remarked from a safe distance. "I didn't think it would slide down inside yore undershirt too. Burn yuh much, Racey dear? You look awful cute standin' there with nothin' on but yore pants. All you need now is a pair of wings an' a bow 'n' arrer an' you'd be a dead ringer for Cupid growed up. Did you know Mis' Lainey an' Mis' Calloway was lookin' at yuh from their kitchen windows? They can hear what yo're sayin', too. Fie, for shame."

BUT Racey Dawson had gathered up his clothing and fled to the back of the corral. Muttering to himself, he was pulling on his shirt when Swing joined him—at a safe distance.

"—— a trick to play on a feller," grumbled Racey.

"Served yuh right," was the return. "You hadn't oughta called me half-witted. Djuh know yuh look just like a turtle in his shell with yore shirt half-on, half-off thataway?"

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"Aw, go sit on yoreself!"

At this juncture fat Bill Lainey wheezed round the corner of the corral.

"What you been doin', Racey?" inquired the hotelkeeper. "Takin' a bath?"

"Naw, I ain't been takin' a bath!" Racey denied ungraciously. "I do this for fun an' my health twice a day—once on Sundays."

"Well, it must 'a' been a heap funny whatever it was or Swing wouldn't be laughin' so hard. Yeah. Lookit, Racey—I meant to catch you at breakfast but you was through before I got back from Mike Flynn's—lookit, I wish you'd go a li'l slow in yore roughhousin' round in my place. Rack Slimson, my most payin' customer, hadda sleep on the dinin'-room table all night 'cause you druv him out of his room."

"Bill, that was a joke," Racey intoned solemnly. "I didn't like the way the feller snored. Likewise he had too much to say. So naturally I had to make him take it on the run. What else could I do? I ask you, what else could I do?"

"Don't you believe him, Bill," cut in Swing, fearful that Racey would get credit for an effort at humor, where, in his own estimation, none was due. "Racey hasn't got the guts to pick a fuss with a pack-rat. It was me that chased Rack Slimson downstairs."

"That's right," Racey assented smoothly, suddenly mindful both of a peculiar gleam in Bill Lainey's eyes and a chance sentence uttered by the hasher in his hearing at breakfast. "That's right. It was Swing Tunstall what made so free an' outrageous with Rack Slimson. You go an' crawl Swing's hump, Bill. Lord knows he needs it. He's been gettin' awful brash an' uppity lately. No livin' with him. Give him ——, Bill."

"I don't wanna give nobody ——. Live at peace is my motto. All I wanna know is who's gonna settle for six cups, eleven sassers, ten plates an' a middle-size pitcher Rack Slimson busted when he rolled off the table with 'em durin' the night? I don't think Rack oughta hafta pay, because he wouldn't 'a' had to sleep there on the table, only bein' druv out thataway he couldn't help it like."

"Huh—how much, Bill?" inquired Swing in a still small voice, and thrust his hand within his pocket.

"Well, seein' as it's you, Swing," was the prompt reply, "I'll only say ten dollars an' six bits. An' that's dirt-cheap. Honest, I'll bet it'll cost me fifteen dollars an' a half to replace 'em, what with the scandalous prices we got now."

"An' I hope that'll make you a better boy, Swing," said Racey, observing with relish the transfer of real money from Swing's hand to the landlord's palm. "There's such a thing, Swing, old settler, as bein' too quick; as whirlin' too wide a loop, as the man said when he roped the locomotive. An' it all costs money. Yep, sometimes as much as ten dollars an' six bits."

". . . an' one an' one an' two makes ten an' six bits makes ten-seventy-five," totaled Swing Tunstall, "an' that makes all square."

"Correct," said Bill Lainey, stuffing the money into a wide trousers pocket. "'Bliged to yuh, Swing. I wish all the gents paid up as prompt as you do."

"Oh, you needn't be surprized," chipped in the ready Racey. "Swing's a fair-minded boy. He'll do what's right every time, once you show him where he's wrong. Yeah. Say, Bill, has Nebraska Jones many friends in this town?"

"More than enough," was the enigmatic reply.

"Enough, huh? Enough for what?"

"For whatever's necessary, Racey. But I ain't talking about Nebraska an' his friends. Not me. I got a wife an' family to support, an' thay's enough trouble runnin' a hotel without pickin' up any more by lettin' yore tongue waggle too much."

"Yo're right, Bill. Yore views do you credit. Is it against the law to tell a feller where Nebraska's friends hang out when they're in town?"

"The dance-hall an' the Starlight," replied Bill Lainey promptly.

"Might you happen to know any of their names, Bill?"

"What you wanna do, Racey, is look out for a jigger named Coffin," declared Lainey, coming flatly to the point. "Doc Coffin. Yep. Then they's Punch-the-breeze Thompson, Honey Hoke an' Peaches Austin. They's a few more, but they ain't the kind to take the lead in anythin'. They always follow. But Coffin, Thompson, Hoke an' Austin are the gents to keep yore eye peeled for. I ain't talkin' about 'em, y' understand. I ain't got a word to say against 'em, not a word. If I was you, though, an' I wanted to live longer an' healthier, Doc Coffin is the one you wanna watch special—a heap special."

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"Thanks, Bill, I——"

"No thanks needed," fended off the hotelkeeper hastily. "I ain't said nothin', an' don't you forget it."

"I won't. Is the Starlight owner, Rack Slimson, any friend of Nebraska's too?"

"We-ell, I dunno as he's a boon companion exactly, but Nebraska an' his bunch spend a pile of money in the Starlight, a pile of money. A feller would be safe in sayin' that Rack Slimson's sympathy is with Nebraska."

CHAPTER VIII

THE STARLIGHT

"WHERE you goin'?" demanded Swing Tunstall.

"Over the hills an' far away to pick the wild violets," chanted Racey. "You wanna come along? Better not. Them violets are just too awful wild. Dangerous. Yeah. Catch yore death."

"You idjit! You plumb fool! Can't you let well-enough alone? Ain't you satisfied till yo're ticklin' the mule's hind leg? If yo're crowded, hop to it. Make 'em hard to find. But why go a-huntin' trouble? Whatsa sense. What——"

"Always get the jump on trouble, Swing. Always. Then you'll find trouble don't wear so many guns after all an' is a heap slower about pullin' 'em than you thought likely."

"But if they're all four of 'em together now, an' you——"

"I ain't said I was gonna do anythin', did I? ——, Swing, I only wanna go an' ask how Nebraska's gettin' along. Only tryin' to be neighborly. Yeah. Neighborly."

Racey Dawson nodded his head as one does when a subject is closed, hitched up his chaps and started blithely round the hotel. Swing Tunstall followed in haste, caught up with his friend and fell into step at his side.

"This ain't none of yore muss, Swing," Racey said mildly.

"It's gonna be," was the determined reply. "You shut up."

Racey grinned at nothing and stuck his tongue in his cheek. A warmly pleasant glow permeated his being. It was good to have a friend like Swing Tunstall—one who would not interfere but who would be in alert readiness for any contingency. And Racey was well-aware that in his impending visit to the Starlight the contingencies were apt to be many and varied.

"It's so early in the day I don't guess none of 'em will be in the dance-hall yet," murmured Swing Tunstall.

"I'm gonna drop in on the Starlight first anyway," said Racey. "It's nearer."

Through a side window they inspected the Starlight and the customers thereof. Only two customers were visible. These, a long man and a short man, stood at the bar, their backs to the window and their hands cupped lovingly round glasses of refreshment. The tall man was talking to the bartender.

"This gettin' up so early in the mornin' is a fright," they heard him complain. "But bunkin' with a invalid shore does keep yuh on the jump."

He and his companion drank. Racey Dawson and Swing Tunstall glided rapidly along the wall to a side entrance. When the tall man and the short man set down their glasses Racey Dawson was leaning against the bar at a range of approximately six feet. Swing Tunstall stood at his back and slightly to the right. This, that should necessity warrant a resort to lethal weapons, Racey might not mask the latter's fire.

"Liquor," said Racey to the bartender.

The latter, an expert at his trade, with a jerk of both wrists slid two glasses and a bottle down the bar so that a glass stopped in front of each man and the bottle came to a standstill between them. Racey spun a dollar on the bar. The bartender nonchalantly swept the dollar into the cash-drawer and resumed his chitchat with the tall man. At which Racey's eyes narrowed slightly but he made no comment.

Pouring out a short drink, he passed the bottle to his comrade. When Swing had filled, Racey took the bottle, drove home the cork with the heel of his hand, and carefully tucked away the bottle in the inner pocket of his vest.

"It won't ride any too well," he observed to Swing, "but it ain't gonna be there a great while, I guess."

"You bet it ain't gonna be there a great while!" horned in the outraged bartender. "You put that bottle back on the bar!"

"Why, I gave you a dollar," said Racey nervously, hesitantly, "an' you kept the change. I s'posed of course you was sellin' me the bottle."

"You s'posed wrong!"

As he spoke the bartender's right hand

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moved toward the shelf that Racey knew must be under the top of the bar.

"That dollar was for yore two drinks."

"You mean to say yo're chargin' four bits apiece for them drinks!"

"Shore I am." As yet the bartender's hand had remained beneath the bar-top.

"But two bits is the regular price," objected Racey weakly.

"Four bits is the price to you," was the truculent statement, sticking out his chin. "*Fat that bottle back on the bar!*"

As he gave the order his right shoulder hunched upward and his face set like iron. He had what is known as a "fighting" face, this Starlight bartender. It was evident that he banked largely on that face. It had served him well in the past.

"One dollar is my regular price for a bottle," Racey said gently as the bartender's hand suddenly flipped into sight, clutching a six-shooter, "but if you want it back, take it."

Racey's fingers gripped the bottle-neck and fetched it forth. But instead of placing it on the top of the bar as requested, he continued the motion, as it were, and smote the bartender across the head with it. Being a quart bottle and reasonaly full of liquid, the bartender's chin came down with a *chug* on the bar. Then he slumped quietly to the floor behind the bar. The six-shooter, relinquished by his nerveless fingers, remained on top of the bar between the whisky-glasses.

RACEY stared speculatively at the long man and the short man. They in turn regarded him with something like respect. The long man wore a drooping streaky-yellow horseshoe of a mustache dominated by a long and melancholy nose. Flanking the base of this sorrowful nose were a pair of eyes hard and bright and of the palest blue.

The short man was a blobby-nosed creature who sported a three days' growth of red beard and a quid of chewing in the angle of a heavy jaw. Now he revolved the tobacco with a furtive tongue and spat thickly upon the floor.

Without removing his eyes from the two aforementioned gentlemen, Racey reached for the bartender's gun.

"Hadn't oughta be trusted with firearms," he observed pleasantly, referring to what lay behind the bar. "Too venturesome. Yeah."

He thoughtfully lowered the hammer of the sixshooter and rammed it down to the trigger-guard behind the waist-band of his trousers.

"Do you gents know anybody named Doc Coffin?" inquired Racey.

"I'm him," nodded the tall man, the pale eye beginning to glitter.

"Then maybe you can tell me how Nebraska Jones is gettin' along?"

"You worryin' about his health?" put in the short man.

"I dunno as I'd say worryin' exactly," disclaimed Racey easily. "You can take it I'm just askin', that's all."

"Nebraska had oughta be as well as ever he was in about a month," supplied Doc. Coffin. "An'," he added significantly, "I dunno but what he'd oughta be able to shoot as well as ever."

"I don't doubt it a mite," said Racey with a smile. "Question is, will he?"

The short man gave a short harsh laugh.

"He will; you can gamble on that," he averred and spat again.

"That's good hearin'," Racey said, looking quite pleased. "Of course I was only judgin' by past performances."

"His gun caught," Doc Coffin explained kindly.

"Why don't he try filin' off his foresight?" inquired Racey chattily. "Or else he could shoot through his holster. Lots o' folks do business that way. I s'pose now you'll be seein' Nebraska in a day or two maybe."

"I might," admitted Doc Coffin.

"Friend of his?" purred Racey.

"I might be." Doc Coffin's spare frame grew somewhat rigid.

"Well," Racey drawled softly, "I heard Nebraska's friends are lookin' for me. I'm here to save 'em the trouble of strainin' their eyes."

"So that's it, huh?" Doc Coffin grinned, as he spoke, like a grieving wolf. "They ain't no hurry, is they?"

"I expect I'll be round Farewell a spell," said Racey.

"Then they ain't no hurry," Doc Coffin told him smoothly.

"None a-tall," contributed the short man.

"That's the way to look at it," laughed Racey. "I shore don't care nothin' about bein' pushed. Have a drink on me."

He slid in their direction the bottle with which he had knocked down the bartender, and, accompanied and imitated by Swing

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Tunstall, departed from that place crabwise.

When they were gone Doc Coffin looked at his companion.

"Askin' for it, Honey," said Doc Coffin. "Just askin' for it."

Then he went behind the bar, seized the senseless bartender by the ankles and skidded him out on the barroom floor. The man whom Doc Coffin had addressed as Honey—his other name was Hoke—spread his legs and whistled when he glimpsed the three-inch cut running fore and aft along the top of the bartender's skull. Blood from the cut had dribbled and oozed over the major portion of the bartender's face and shirt. For it had been the bartender's luck to hook his chin on the edge of the lowest shelf when he dropped, and he had perforce remained crown upward.

Doc Coffin stood back and stared at the stertorously breathing lump on the floor with a cold eye.

"Ain't he a mess?" he observed. "Ain't he a mess? I expect he'll be right down peevish about it when he comes to."

"Think so." Honey Hoke was not quite sure of the point of Doc's remark.

"Yeah, I think so. I'm shore he will when I tell him how he was kicked."

"Kicked?"

"Shore; kicked. Kicked after he was down."

"How?"

"Didn't you see that feller Dawson kick Bull when he was down? Where was yore eyes?"

"That's the way of it, huh? Well, it might save trouble if Bull was to go on the prod real vicious."

"Yo're whistlin'. They ain't no manner o' reason for doin' a job yoreself if yuh can get somebody else to do it for yuh."

WHEN Bull came to, he was lying adjoining the back room of the Starlight on his cot in his little cubby-hole light. Over across from the bed Doc Coffin was looking out of the grimy window. Behind the closed door giving egress to the back room certain folk were busy at faro.

"King win, ten lose," the dealer was saying.

Doc Coffin turned at the rustle of Bull's slight movement. Doc nodded grimly.

"How's the head?" he inquired.

Bull put up a hand to the bandage encircling his bullet-head and swore feelingly.

"Guess it does hurt some," was Doc's comment. "Doc Alton took three stitches. Lucky you was still senseless. He hadda use a harness-needle."

Bull heartily damned Doc Alton, his methods, the faro-players in the next room, himself, and wound up with a blistering curse directed against mankind in general and Racey Dawson in particular.

"Tha's right, Bull," Doc Coffin applauded dryly. "Cuss him out. Give him——. Must do yuh a lot of good."

Bull was understood to consign Doc Coffin to the region of lost souls.

"I'd go a leetle slow," advised Doc Coffin gently. "Just a leetle slow if I was you. Yo're on yore back now but you'll be gettin' all right in a li'l while, an' it's just possible, Bull, I might take it into my head to ask yuh what you meant by all them cuss-words yo're throwin' at me."

There was an icy glint in the pale blue eyes of Doc Coffin. Bull shut up and subsided.

"What," queried Doc Coffin after a momentary silence, "was the matter with you?"

"With me?"

"Shore, with you. Who'm I talkin' to? What was the matter with yuh anyway? Don't yuh know no better'n to go up against a jigger like that Dawson man? Yo're too cripplin' slow with a gun, feller."

"Well, I——"

"Y'oughta had him twice while he was swingin' that bottle. Yeah, twice, I'm tellin' yuh. Yuh had time enough. But not you. Yuh just stood there like a bump on a log an' let him hit yuh. Yo're a fine-lookin' example of a two-legged man, you are. If you ain't careful, Bull, some two-year-old infant is gonna come along an' spit in yore eye."

"He was so —— quick," alibied Bull. "I wasn't expectin' it."

"A whole lot of folks are underground because they didn't expect to get what they got. Yo're lucky to be lyin' there with only a headache. Still alla same he needn't 'a' kicked yuh."

"Huh? Kicked me? You mean to say he kicked me? Dawson kicked me?"

"Shore I mean to say Dawson kicked yuh. Kicked yuh when yuh was lyin' there down an' out an' senseless."

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A moment Bull lay quietly. Then when the full import of Doc Coffin's words had percolated through and through his brain he pulled himself to a sitting-posture and swung a leg to the floor. Doc Coffin was beside him instantly.

"Lie down, you idjit!" commanded Doc Coffin, and with no gentle hand shoved Bull down upon his pillow. "Whadda you think yo're gonna do?"

"I'm goin' out an' fill that —— full of lead."

"Oh, you are, huh? Yo're gonna do all that? Tha's fine. Do you want a quiet burial or a regular funeral?"

"Say——"

"Say yoreself, an' say somethin' sensible while yo're about it."

"Nobody can kick me an' get away with it!" Bull declared passionately. "I'll——"

"Maybe you will, but not in a hurry. You start out after him now an' you wouldn't last as long as a short drink in a roomful of drunkards. Didn't you hear about Dawson's li'l run-in with Nebraska?"

"——, I seen it!"

"You seen it, huh? An' you know what he done to yuh today, an' still you wanna paint for war now an' immediate? No, Bully, not a-tall. You listen to me. I got a better plan. A whole lot better plan. Lookit——"

CHAPTER IX

THROWING SAND

AFTER leaving the Starlight, on their way back to the hotel, Racey said to Swing Tunstall—

"Might as well tell Jack Harpe now we ain't gonna ride for him, huh?"

"Oh, shore," Swing sighed resignedly. "Have it yore own way! Have it yore own way! I never seen such a feller as you for gettin' his own way in all my life."

"Yo're young yet—maybe you will," said Racey consolingly. "So don't get discouraged."

They did not find Jack Harpe at the hotel, nor was he at the Happy Heart. But in the saloon Luke Tweezy was drinking by himself at one end of the bar. Perhaps the money-lender would know the whereabouts of Jack Harpe.

"'Lo, Luke," was Racey's greeting. "Seen Jack Harpe around anywheres?"

Luke Tweezy's thin and sandy eyebrows lifted in what would pass with almost any one for surprize.

"Who?"

"Jack Harpe."

"Dunno him." Indifferently—too indifferently.

"You dunno him—long, slim feller, black hair an' eyes an' a hawky kind o' nose? Jack Harpe. Shore yuh know him. Why, I seen—" Racey broke off abruptly.

"Yeah," prompted Luke Tweezy after an interval. "You seen—what?"

"I don't see why yuh dunno him," parried Racey. It was a weak parry, but the best he could encompass at the moment. "I thought you knowed him. Somebody told me yuh did. My mistake. No harm done. Have a drink, Luke."

"Who told yuh I knowed this here now Jack Harpe?" probed Luke Tweezy when he had smacked his lips over a second drink.

"I don't remember now," evaded Racey Dawson. "What does it matter?"

"It don't matter," was the answer—the miffed answer it seemed to Racey. "It don't matter a-tall. Have one on me, boys. Don't be afraid to fill 'em up. They's plenty more on the back shelf when this one's empty."

They filled and drank, filled and drank. Swing thought that he had never seen Racey overtaken by liquor so quickly. In no time he was telling Luke Tweezy the most intimate details of his private life. Swing knew that these details were a string of lies. But Luke Tweezy could not know that. He put an affectionate hand on Racey's shoulder and begged for more. He got it.

When Racey ran down and reverted to the bottle, Luke Tweezy generously purchased a second and invited him and his friend to a vacant table in the corner of the room. It was an amazing sight. Luke Tweezy the money-lender, the man who was supposed still to possess the first dollar he ever earned, had actually bought three-eighths of one bottle of whisky and the whole of another.

Racey Dawson greatly desired to laugh. But he didn't dare. He was too busy being drunk and getting drunker. Swing Tunstall, slow on the uptake as usual, perceived nothing beyond the fact that Luke Tweezy had suddenly become a careless spendthrift till half-way down the second bottle, when Luke said—

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"Shore is funny how you thought I knowed this Jack Harpe."

"Yuh-yeah," assented Racey, and upset a glass in such a way that four fingers of raw liquor splashed into Luke Tweezy's lap. "S'funny all right—an' that's fuf-funnier," he added as Luke and his chair scraped backward to avoid the drip. "D'I wet yuh all up, Lul-luke? Mum-my mim-mistake. I'm makin' lul-lots of mistakes today."

Luke Tweezy twisted his leathery features into his best smile.

"It don't matter," he told Racey. "Not a-tall. I—uh—who was it told yuh I knowed this Jack Harpe?"

"Dud-don't remember," denied Racey.

"Think," urged Luke Tweezy.

"Am thu-thinkin'," Racey said crossly. "What yuh wanna know for?"

"I don't like to have folks talkin' so loose an' free about me," was the Tweezy explanation.

"Duh-*hic*-quite right," hiccupped Racey Dawson. "An' you are too, y'old catawampus. You a friend o' mum-mine, Lul-luke?"

"Shore," said Luke, with an eye out for another upset glass.

"Then lend me huh-hundred dollars, Lul-luke."

"Lend you a hundred dollars! On what security?"

"My wuh-word," Racey strove to say with dignity. "Ain't that enough?"

"Shore, but—but I ain't got a hundred dollars with me today."

"Bub-but you can gug-get it," Racey insisted, weaving his head from side to side in a snake-like manner.

"We-ell, I dunno. Yuh see, Racey——"

"I nun-need the money," interrupted Racey. "I'm broke; bub-broke bad. Swing's broke too. That's too bad—I mean that's two bub-broke brad—whistle twice for the crossing—I mean— Aw —— I know whu-what I mean if—if you don't. You lul-lend me that mum-money, Lul-luke, like a good feller."

Luke Tweezy shook a regretful head. "I'm shore sorry you an' Swing are busted, Racey. I'd do anything for you I could in reason. You know —— well I would, but money's tight with me just now. I ain't really got a cent I can lend. Got a mortgage comin' due next month, but that ain't now, of course."

"Of course not. Huh-how could you think it was now? Huh-how could you, Lul-luke? Dud-do yuh know the child ain't a year old yet?"

"Child? What child?" Luke Tweezy began to look alarmed.

"What child?" Racey Dawson frowned, sitting up very straight and throwing a chest. "That child over there by the doorway. There in the streak o' su'sh-shine. Aw, the cute li'l feller! See him playin' with Windy Taylor's spurs. Ain't he cunnin'?"

"With most of 'em it's elephants an' snakes an' such," proffered Luke Tweezy.

"Yeah," assented Swing Tunstall. "A kid is somethin' new."

"Thu-then you can't lend me that money?" Racey inquired querulously.

"No, Racey, I can't. Honest, I'd like to. Nothin' I'd like better. Only the way I'm fixed just now it's plain flat impossible."

"Then I s'puh-s'puh-s'pose I'll have to touch the Bar S folks or the Cross-in-a-box. I gotta have money. Gug-gotta. They're my friends. They'll give it to mum-me. Shore they will gimme all I want. They're all my friends, I tell yuh!"

AS RACEY uttered the word "friends" his toe pressed Swing Tunstall's instep.

"They're Swing's friends too," continued Racey. "Ain't they, Sus-Swing?" Again the Dawson toe bore down upon the Tunstall foot.

"Shore they are," chimed in Swing, watching his friend closely—so closely that he was able to catch the extremely slight nod of approbation given by Racey.

"Thu-there's Tom Loudon an' Tim Pup-pup-page of the Bub-bar S," stuttered Racey, gazing blearily at Luke Tweezy. "Bub-best fuf-friends I yever had, them tut-two fellers. An' Old Man Sush-Saltoun. There's a pup-prince for yuh. Gug-give you the shirt off his bub-back."

Which last was stretching it rather. For Old Man Saltoun, while not precisely stingy, was certainly not the most generous person in the territory. Nor did it escape Racey Dawson that Luke Tweezy eyed him sharply as he made the remark. At once Racey began to roll his head from side to side and rock his body to and fro and laugh crazily.

"The Bub-bub-bar S is the bub-best ranch in the worl'." Again Racey took up the thread of his discourse. "I tell yuh

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that outfit is great friends o' mine. Juh-juh-just tut-to shuh-show yuh, Lul-luke. Ol' Man Sush-Saltoun let three punchers go lul-last week an' then turned round an' gives us both jobs. That's huh-how we stand with ol' Man Sush-Saltoun."

"That's fine," complimented Luke Tweezy.

"An' that ain't all," Racey galloped on, one toe pressing Swing's instep. "I'm gonna tell him, Swing. He ain't no friend o' Jack Harpe's. If I tell yuh, you won't tell nobody, Lul-luke, wuh-will yuh?"

Luke was understood to state that no clam could be tighter-mouthed.

"I knowed you wouldn't tell, Lul-luke," Racey declared solemnly, reaching across the table and affectionately pawing the Tweezy sleeve. "I mum-maybe dud-drunk, but I know a friend when I see him. Yuh bub-bet I do. Lul-lookit, Luke, lean over."

Here Racey pressed heavily on Swing's instep. Then, when Luke leaned forward, Racey did the same and possessed himself of the money-lender's ear by the simple method of gripping it tightly between fingers and thumb.

"Lul-luke," resumed Racey, "Jack Harpe offered us a job too an' we're gonna take him up instead of the Bar S. Huh-how's that?"

Racey released the Tweezy ear, leaned back in his chair and breathed triumphantly through his nose.

Luke Tweezy likewise leaned back as far as his chair would permit; and touched tenderly a tingling ear. "Whatcha gonna do that for?" he asked, puzzled. "I thought you liked the Bar S such a lot."

"We do," chirped Racey, laying a long finger beside his nose and pressing again the Tunstall instep. "What's why we're gonna ride for Jack Harpe."

Grinning at the mystification of Luke Tweezy, he leaned forward and whispered—

"We got a idea we can help the Bar S most by bein' where we can watch Jack—an' his outfit."

Luke Tweezy sat up very suddenly. Swing clapped a hand over Racey's mouth and shoved him backward.

"Shut up!" commanded Swing. "He dunno what he's talkin' about, the poor drunk."

Thus did Swing Tunstall come up to the scratch right nobly. Racey could have hugged him. Instead he bit him. This in order that Swing should pull his hand away in a natural manner. Having achieved his purpose, Racey smiled sottishly at Luke Tweezy.

"But what's Jack Harpe done?" Luke Tweezy inquired swiftly.

"It ain't what he's done," Racey replied. "It's what he's gug-gonna do. He's out to cuc-cold-deck the Bub-bar S, an' they nun-know it."

Whereupon Swing began to shake him severely.

"Stop yore ravin!" he commanded, and contrived to bang Racey's head against the wall with a bump that went a long way toward curing the pain of Racey's bite.

Racey, with real tears in his eyes, looked up at Swing and gurgled—

"I'm sho shleepy." Then he laid his head upon his arms and slept. Luke Tweezy did not attempt to awaken him. Swing Tunstall advised against it. Luke Tweezy and he had a parting drink together. Then the money-lender took what was left of the second bottle of whisky—the first was but a memory—to the bar and endeavored to chivvy a rebate out of the bartender. But such a procedure was decidedly not the Happy Heart's method of doing business. Luke Tweezy, much to his disgust, for he never did so except in the way of trade, was forced to carry his bottle with him when he went.

Swing, sapient young person, walked casually to the window and watched Luke Tweezy cross the street to Calloway's store. Then he returned to Racey's table. Racey turned his tousled head sidewise and whispered from a corner of his mouth:

"Help me out to Tom Kane's stable. He's out of town, an' there won't nobody bother us."

"C'mon, Racey, come alive," urged Swing Tunstall, making a great business of shaking awake his drunken friend. "You don't wanna stay here no longer. I know a fine place where you can sleep it off."

TEN minutes later Racey and Swing were sitting comfortably on a pile of hay in Tom Kane's new stable. Racey pulled off his boots, flopped down on the hay and clasped his hands behind his head. He wiggled his toes luxuriously and laughed.

"——," said he, "Think o' that old skin-flint buyin' nearly two bottles of whisky! Bet that'll lay heavy on his mind for as

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much as a month. What yuh lookin' at me like that for?"

"Yeah, I'd ask if I was you. I shore would. What was yore bright idea of tellin' Luke Tweezy we was gonna ride for Jack Harpe so as to watch him?"

"So he'd know it."

"So he'd know it. So he'd know it! The man sits there an' says 'so he'd know it!' An' you call me a thickskull! Yore head has got mine snowed under thataway. Can't you see, you droolin' fool, that now they'll know as much as we do?"

"No, oh, no," Racey denied with a superior smile. "Not never a-tall. I ain't sayin' they mightn't know as much as you do by yoreself. But not while you got the benefit of my brains they won't know as much as we do. 'Tain't possible."

"An what did you bite me for? ——'s bells, if you'd bit Luke I wouldn't have a word to say, but why pick on me?"

"Well, you bumped my head so hard I saw sparks, so we're even. Say, stop squallin' about yore hand! I didn't bite you half as hard as I might have. Not half. You can still use the hand all right, can't yuh? Yeah. Well then you ain't got nothin' to cry about, not a thing."

"Talk sense, will yuh. You got us into a fine mess, you have. A fi-ine mess."

"Guess I fooled him all right," Racey said with irritating complacency.

"What was you tryin' to do anyway?" Swing snarled, glaring at his friend. "What was the notion of tearin' off all them confidences about bein' busted an' yore dear friends at the Bar S an' how you an' me was gonna play detective? An' to think Providence lets a what-you-may-call-it like you go on livin'! It ain't reasonable."

"That business o' tellin' Luke we was busted," grinned Racey, "an' askin' him for a loan was just so's I could work up round about an' natural-like to how the Bar S bunch was my personal friends an' how we was gonna ride for Jack Harpe an' watch him on their account. I wanted him to know them things an' I couldn't slam out an' tell him dry so, could I? It wouldn't sound natural. It would make him think the wrong way, you bet. Luke Tweezy ain't a plumb fool, for all he made the mistake of denyin' he knowed Jack Harpe. That was a bad one."

"Yeah, but——"

"Lookit, Swing, we know that when Lanpher spoke of a front yard there in the hotel corral he meant the Bar S range. Aw right. While we're shore Jack Harpe wants to hire us to do his dirty work, which means bein' rubbed out by our own friends likely, would he let us ride for him if he thought the Bar S was payin' us to watch him?"

"Not if he knowed what he was doin'," admitted Swing. "That's why I got so greasy an' confidential with Mister Luke Tweezy. So Jack Harpe will know."

"An' Luke will tell him?"

"Will Luke tell him? Luke will run to him a-pantin'. I'll gamble Jack Harpe knows the awful worst already. So we'll be safe enough to go to Jack tomorrow mornin' bright an' early an' tell him we've decided to give him the benefit of our services."

"But I thought we figured not to ride for him," said the now thoroughly bewildered Swing.

"Of course we ain't. In words of one syllable, Swing, I wanna find out if it is the Bar S Jack Harpe's goin' against. Well then, we knowin' what we know, an' Jack Harpe knowin' what we know he knows, if he turns us down tomorrow after offerin' us the job yesterday, it'll not only give us the absolute proof we want but it'll make him turn his wolf loose P D Q. An' that last will be good medicine, 'cause if I'm any judge he ain't ready to start nothin' yet a while an' I notice when a gent ain't ready an' has to jump anyhow he's a heap likely to fall down an' smear himself all over the landscape."

"The man's right," said Swing. "But it's the oddest number alla same I ever did see. All kinds o' clues to a crime an' no crime yet."

"It'll come," said Racey Dawson grimly. "Jack Harpe is one bad actor."

"What you got against him—I mean, anythin' particular besides yore natural dislike?" Swing Tunstall at times was blessed with flashes of penetrating shrewdness.

"I ain't got no use for him, thassall." Much emphasis on the part of Racey Dawson.

Swing nodded.

"See him at Moccasin Spring?" was his drawled question.

"I didn't say so." Stiffly.

"You didn't have to. An' you don't—not now. I see it all. An' you yawpin' out real loud how interested you are in seein'

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how the Bar S gets a square deal an' lettin' out only a small peep about old Dale, an' thinkin' yo're foolin' Swing to a fare-you-well. Oh, yeah. It's the Dales' li'l ranch that's been worryin' you alla time.

"I know. Racey's actually got a girl at last. I kind o' suspicioned it but I didn't think it was so heap big serious. Don't you fret, Racey, old-timer. I'll keep yore secret. Till death does—' Ouch! Leggo me, you poor hickory! Yo're s'posed to be sleepin' off a drunk, remember. G'wan now! Lie down, Fido! Charge, you bad dog!"

"But lookit," resumed Swing Tunstall, when the dust of conflict was beginning to settle and he was poking about in the hay in search of three shirt buttons and his pocket-knife, "lookit, Racey, you didn't say nothin' to Luke about yo're being' friendly with this Dale party. Guess you forgot that, huh?"

"Guess I didn't forget it," returned Racey Dawson placidly. "It ain't good euchre to lead all yore trumps before yuh gotta. I'm savin' that about Dale to tell to Jack Harpe after he turns us down. I'm a heap anxious to see what he says then."

"Maybe he won't say nothin'."

"Maybe he won't turn us down. But will you bet he won't? Give yuh odds. Any money up to a hundred."

"I will not," said Swing Tunstall, shaking a decided head. "Yo're too lucky. Oh, lookit, lookit!"

CHAPTER X

THE BACK PORCH

RACEY'S gaze casually and uninterestedly followed Swing's pointing finger. Immediately his eye brightened and he sat up with a jerk.

"I'll shove the door a li'l further open," said Swing, making as if to rise.

"Sit still," hissed Racey, pulling down his friend with one hand and endeavoring to smooth his own hair with the other. "Yo're all right, an' the door's all right. I'm goin' over there in a minute an' if yo're good I'll take you with me."

"Over there" was the back porch of the Blue Pigeon Store. Swing's exclamations and laudable desire to see better were called forth by the sudden appearance on the back porch of two girls. One was Miss Blythe. The other was Miss Molly Dale.

There were two barrel-chairs on the porch. Miss Blythe picked up a piece of embroidery on a frame from the seat of one of the chairs and sat down. Molly Dale seated herself in the other chair, crossed a knee and swung a slim booted leg. From the breast pocket of her boy's gray flannel shirt she produced a long narrow strip of white to which appeared to be fastened a small dark object. She held the strip of white in her left hand. Her right hand held the dark object and with it began to make a succession of quick, wavy, hooky dabs at one end of the strip of white.

"First time I ever seen anybody tryin' to knit without needles," said the perplexed Swing.

"That ain't knittin'," said the superior Racey. "That's tattin'."

"Tattin'?"

"Tattin'."

"What's it for?"

"Lingery." Racey pronounced the word to rhyme with "clingery."

"Lingery?"

"Lingery."

"What's lingery?"

"Lingery is clo'es."

"Clo'es, huh? —— uva funny name for clo'es. Why don't yuh say clo'es then instead of this here now lingery?"

" 'Cause lingery is a certain kind of clo'es, you ignorant Jack. Petticoats, an' the like o' that. Don't you know nothin'?"

"I know yo're lyin', that's what I know. Yo're bluffin' yuh hear me whistlin'. Yuh dunno no more about it than I do. You can't tell me petticoats is made out of a strip o' white stuff less'n a half-inch wide. I've seen too many washin's hangin' on the line, I have. Yeah. An' done too many. When I was a young one my ma would tie an apron round my neck, slap me down beside a tubful o' clo'es an' tell me to fly at it. Petticoats! Petticoats, feller, is made of yards an' yards an' yards like a balloon."

"Who said they wasn't, you witless Jake? They don't make petticoats of this tattin' stuff. They use it for trimmin' like."

"Trimmin' on the petticoats?"

"An' the lingery."

"But you just now said petticoats an' lingery was the same thing."

"Oh, my ——! They are! They are the same thing. Don't y' understand? Petticoats is always lingery, but lingery ain't always petticoats. See?"

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"I don't. I don't see a-tall. I think yo're goin' crazy. That's what I think. Nev' mine. Nev' mine. If you say lingery at me again I won't let you introduce me to yore girl."

"She ain't my girl," denied Racey, reddening.

"But you'd like her to be, huh? Shore. What does she think about it? Which one of 'em is she?"

"I didn't say neither of 'em was. You always did take too much for granted, Swing."

"I ain't takin' too much for granted with you blushin' thataway. Which one? Tell a feller. C'mon, stingy."

"Shucks," said Racey. "I should think you could tell. The best-lookin' one, of course."

"But they's two of 'em, feller, an' they both look mighty fine to me. Take that one with the white shirt an' the slick brown hair. She's as pretty as a li'l red wagon. A reg'lar doll baby, you bet yuh."

"Doll baby! Ain't you got no eyes? That brown-haired girl—an' I wanna say right here I never did like brown hair—is Joy Blythe, Bill Derr's girl. Of course, Bill's a good feller an' all that, an' if he likes that style o' beauty it ain't nothin' against him. But that other girl now. Swing, you purblind bat, when it comes to looks, she lays all over Joy Blythe like four aces over a bobtailed flush."

"She does, huh? You got it bad. Here's hopin' it ain't catchin'. I've liked girls now an' then my own self, but I never liked one so hard I couldn't see nothin' good in another one. Now, humanly speakin', either of them two on the porch would suit me."

"An' neither of 'em ain't gonna suit you, an' you can gamble on that, Swing Tunstall."

"Oh, ain't they? We'll see about that. You act like I never seen a girl before. Lemme tell yuh I know how to act all right in company. I ain't no hilltop Reuben."

"If you ain't then pin up yore shirt where I tore the buttons off. You look like the wrath o' ——."

"You ain't nothin' to write home about yore own self. I can button up my vest an' look respectable, but they's hayseeds an' shuttlin's all over you, an' besides I got a necktie, an' yore handkerchief is so sloshed up yuh can't tie it round yore neck. Yo're a fine-lookin' specimen to go a-visitin'. A fi-ine-lookin' specimen. An' anyway yo're drunk. You can't go."

"—— I can't," snapped Racey, brushing industriously. "They never seen me."

"But Luke Tweezy did," chuckled Swing.

"What's Luke gotta do with it?" Racey inquired without looking up.

"If you'd slant yore eyes out through the door you'd see what Luke Tweezy's gotta to do with it."

Racey Dawson looked up and immediately sat down on the hay and spoke in a low tone.

Swing nodded with delight.

"You'll cuss worse'n that when I go over an' make Luke introduce me," he said. "He's been out there on the porch with 'em the last five minutes an' you was so busy argufyin' with me you never looked up to see him. An' you talk of goin' over an' doin' the polite. Yah, you make me laugh! This is shore one on you, Racey. Don't you wish now you hadn't made out to be so drunk?

"Lookit Luke. He's a-offerin' 'em somethin' in a paper poke. They're a-eatin' it. He musta bought some candy. I'll bet they's all of a dime's worth in that bag. The spendthrift. How he must like them girls. It's yore girl he's shinin' up to special, Racey. Ain't he the lady-killer? Look out, Racey. You won't have a chance alongside o' Luke Tweezy."

"Swing," said Racey in a voice ominously calm and level, "if you don't shut yore trap I'll shore wrastle you down an' tromp on yore stummick."

So saying, he reached for Swing Tunstall. But the latter, watchful person, eluded the clutching hands and hurried through the doorway.

RACEY, seething with rage, could only sit and hug his knees while Swing went up on the porch and was introduced to the two girls. It was some balm to his tortured soul to see how ill Luke Tweezy took Swing's advent. Did Luke really like Molly Dale? The old goat! Why, the man was old enough to be her father.

And did she like him? Lordy man alive, how could she? But Luke Tweezy had money. Girls liked money, Racey knew that. He had known a girl to marry a more undesirable human being than Luke Tweezy

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simply because the man was rich. Personally, he, Racey Dawson, were he a girl, would prefer the well-known honest heart to all the wealth in the territory.

But girls were queer, and sometimes did queer things. Molly—was she queer? He didn't know. She looked sensible, yet why was she so infernally polite to Luke Tweezy? She didn't have to smile at him when he spoke to her. It wasn't necessary. Racey's spirit groaned within him. Finally the spectacle of the chattering group on the back porch of the Blue Pigeon proved more than Racey could stand. He retreated into a dark corner of the barn and lay down on the hay. But he did not go to sleep. Far from it.

Later he removed his boots, stuffed them full of hay and hunkered down behind a dismounted wagon-seat over which a wagon-cover had been flung. With a short length of rope and several handfuls of hay he propped the boots in such a position that they stuck out beyond the wagon-box ten or twelve inches and gave every evidence of human occupation.

Boosting up with a bushel basket the stiff canvas at the end opposite the boots, he made the wagon-cover stretch long enough and high enough to conceal the important fact that there were no legs or body attached to the boots.

Which being done, Racey took up a strategic position behind an upended crate near the doorway.

He proceeded to wait. He waited quite a while. The afternoon drained away. The sun set. In the dusk of the evening Racey heard footsteps. Swing Tunstall. He'd know his step anywhere. The individual making the footsteps came to the doorway of the barn, halted an instant, then walked in. Almost at once he stumbled over the boots. Then Racey sprang upon his back with a joyous shout and slammed him headforemost over the wagon-seat into the pile of hay.

The man swore—and the voice was not that of Swing Tunstall. On the heels of this unwelcome discovery Racey made another. The man had dragged out a knife from under his armpit, and was squirmingly endeavoring to make play with it. Racey's intended practical joke on Swing Tunstall was in a fair way to become a tragedy on himself.

There was no time to make explanations, even had Racey been so inclined. The man was strong and the knife was long and presumably sharp. Racey, pinioning his opponent's knife-arm with one hand and his teeth, flashed out his gun and smartly clipped the man over the head with the barrel. Instantly, so far as an active participation in the affair of the moment, the man ceased to function. He lay limp as a sodden moccasin and breathed stertorously. Racey knelt at his side and laid his hand on the top of the man's head. The palm came away warmly wet. Racey replaced his gun in its holster and pulled the senseless one out on the barn floor near the doorway where he could see him better.

The man was Luke Tweezy.

Racey sat down and began to pull on his boots. There was nothing to be gained by remaining in the barn. Tweezy was not badly hurt. The blow on the head had resulted, so far as Racey could discover—later he was to learn that his diagnosis had been correct—in a mere scalp-wound.

Racey, when his boots were on, picked up his hat. At least he thought it was his hat. When he put it on, however, it proved a poor fit. He had taken Tweezy's hat by mistake. He dropped it on the floor and turned to pick up his own where it lay behind the wagon-seat.

But, as he wheeled, a flicker of white showed inside the crown of Tweezy's hat where it lay on the floor. Racey swung back, stooped down and turned out the leather sweat-band of Tweezy's hat, at the edge of which had been revealed the bit of white.

The latter proved to be one corner of a folded letter. Without the least compunction Racey tucked this letter into the breast pocket of his flannel shirt. Then he set about searching Tweezy's clothing with thoroughness. But other than the odds and ends usually to be found in a man's pockets there was nothing to interest the searcher.

Racey carefully turned back the sweat-band of the hat, placed the head-piece on top of the wagon-seat and departed. He went as far as the Happy Heart corral. Behind the corral he sat down on his heels and took out the letter he had purloined from Luke Tweezy. He opened it and read it by the light of matches shielded behind his hat. The letter ran:

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Dear Friend Luke:

I don't think much of your plan. Too dangerous. The Land Office is getting stricter every day. This thing must be absolutely legal in every way. You can't bull ahead and trust to luck where there aren't any holes. There mustn't be any holes, not a —— hole. Try my plan; the one I discussed so thoroughly with you last week. It will take longer perhaps, but it is absolutely safe. You must learn to be more careful with the law from now on, Luke. I know what I'm talking about.

I tell you plainly if you don't accept my scheme and work to it religiously I'm out of the deal absolutely. I'm not going to risk my liberty because of other people's foolhardiness.

Show this letter to Jack Harpe, and let me know your decision.

Another thing, impress upon Jack the necessity of you two keeping publicly apart until after the deal is sprung. When you talk to him go off somewheres where no one will see you. I heard he spoke to you on the street. Lanpher told me. This must not happen again while we are partners. Don't tell Doc Coffin's outfit more than they need to know.

Yours truly,
JACOB POOLEY.

Racey blew out the fourth match and folded the letter with care and replaced it in the envelop. He sat back on his heels and looked up into the darkening sky. Jacob Pooley. Well, well, well. If Fat Jakey Pooley, the registrar of the district, was mixed up in the business the opposition would have its work cut out in advance. Yes indeedy. For no man could walk the tight rope of the law more convincingly than Fat Jakey.

Racey Dawson did not know Fat Jakey except by sight but he had heard most of the tales told of the gentleman. And they were *tales*. Many of them were accepted by the countryside as gospel truth. Perhaps half of them were true. A good-natured, cunning, dishonest and indefatigable featherer of a lucrative political nest—that was Fat Jakey. Racey Dawson sat and thought hard through two cigarets. Then he thumbed out the butt, got to his feet and started to return to the hotel. For it had suddenly come upon him that he was hungry.

But half-way round the corral an idea impinged upon his consciousness with the force of a bullet.

"——," he muttered. "I am a Jack!"

HE TURNED and retraced his steps to the corner of the corral. Here he stopped and removed his spurs. He stuffed a spur into each hip pocket and moved cautiously and on tiptoe toward Tom Kane's barn.

It was almost full night by now. But in the west still glowed the faintly red streak of the dying embers of the day. Racey suddenly bethought him that the red streak was at his back, therefore he dropped on all fours and proceeded catwise.

He was too late. Before he reached the back of the barn he heard the feet of two people crunching the hard ground in front of it. The sound of the footsteps died out on the grass between the barn and the houses fronting on Main Street.

Racey, hurrying after and still on all fours, suddenly saw the dark shape of a tall man loom in front of him. He halted perforce. His own special brand of bull luck was with him. The dark shape, walking almost without a sound, shaved his body so closely as it passed that he felt the stir of the air against his face.

When the man had gone on a few yards Racey looked over his shoulder. Silhouetted against the streak of dying red was the upper half of Jack Harpe's torso. There was no mistaking the set of that head and those wide shoulders. Both it and they were unmistakably Jack Harpe. Racey swore behind his teeth. If only he could have reached the barn in time to hear what the two men had said to each other.

After a decent interval, Racey went on. The Happy Heart was the nearest saloon. He felt reasonably certain that Luke Tweezy would go there to have his cut head dressed. He had. Racey, his back against the bar, looked on with interest at the bandaging of Luke Tweezy by the proprietor.

"Yep," said Luke, sitting sidewise in the chair, "stubbed my toe against a cord-wood stick in front o' Tom Kane's barn an' hit my head on a rock. Knocked me silly."

"Sh'd think it might," grunted the proprietor, attending to his job with difficulty because Luke would squirm. "Hold still, will yuh, Luke?"

"Yo're takin' twice as many stitches as necessary," grumbled Luke.

"I ain't," denied the proprietor. "An' I got two more to take. Hold still."

"Don't need to deafen me!" squalled Luke indignantly.

"Shut up!" ordered the proprietor, who, since he did not owe any money to Luke, was not prepared to pay much attention to his fussing. "If you think I'm enjoyin' this, you got another guess comin'. An'

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if you don't like the way I'm doin' it, yuh can do it yoreself."

Luke stood up at last, a white bandage encircling his head, said that he was much obliged, and would like to borrow a lantern for a few moments.

"Aw, you don't need no lantern," objected the proprietor. "I forgot to fill mine today anyway. Can't yuh find yore way to the hotel in the dark? That crack on the top-knot didn't blind yuh, did it?"

"I lost somethin'," explained Luke Tweezy. "When I fell down most all my money slipped out of my pocket."

"I'll get yuh a lantern then," grumbled the proprietor.

Ten minutes later Luke Tweezy, frantically quartering the floor of Tom Kane's barn, heard a slight sound and looked up to see Racey Dawson and Swing Tunstall standing in the doorway.

"I didn't know yuh fell down inside the barn," Racey observed.

"There's lots you dunno," said Luke ungraciously.

"So there is," assented Racey. "But don't rub it in, Luke. Rubbin' it in hurts my feelin's. An' my feelin's is tender today—most awful tender, Luke. Don't you go for to lacerate 'em. I ain't owin' you a dime, yuh know."

To this Luke Tweezy made no comment. But he resumed his squattering about the floor and his poking and delving in the piles of hay. He raised a dust that flew up in clouds. He coughed and snorted and snuffed. Racey and Swing Tunstall laughed.

"Makes yuh think of a hay-tedder, don't he?" grinned Racey. "How much did yuh lose, Luke—two bits?"

At this Luke looked up sharply. "Seems to me yuh got over yore drunk pretty quick," said he.

"Oh, my liquor never stays by me a great while," Racey told him easily. "That's the beauty of bein' young. When yuh get old an' toothless an' deecrepit like some people, not to mention no names of course, why then she's a cat with another tail entirely."

"What's goin' on in here?" It was Red Kane speaking. Red was Tom Kane's brother.

Racey and Swing moved apart to let him through. Red Kane entered, stared at the spectacle of Luke Tweezy and his bobbing lantern and stared and stared again.

"What yuh doin', Luke?" he demanded.

"Luke's lost a nickel, Red," Racey answered for the lawyer. "An' a nickel, yuh know yoreself, is worth all of five cents."

"I lost some money," grumbled Luke.

"But you said you lost it when you tripped an' fell," said Racey, "an' you fell outside."

"I lost it here," Luke said shortly.

"I don't give a —— where you lost it or what you lost," declared Red Kane. "You can't go flirtin' round with no lantern in Tom's barn. First thing you know you'll set it a-fire. C'mon, Luke, pull yore freight."

"But lookit here," protested Luke, "I lost somethin' valuable, Red. I gotta find it."

"It wasn't money then?" put in Racey.

"'Course it was money," averred Luke.

"You said 'it' this time, Luke."

"It don't matter what I said. I lost some money, an' I wanna find it."

"You can want all yuh like," said Red Kane, "but not in this barn. C'mon back tomorrow mornin', an' yuh can hunt the barn to pieces, but you can't do no more skirmishin' round in here tonight. I'll lock the barn door so's nobody else'll go fussbudgettin' round in here. C'mon, Luke, get a move on yuh."

So Luke was driven out much against his will, and Racey and Swing roamed around to the dance-hall. Here at a table in the ell where the bar stretched its length they could sit and talk unheard under cover of the music.

"But how come you had yore boots off?" Swing desired to know when a table, a bottle and two glasses were between them. "Don't try to tell me you stuck 'em behind that wagon-seat on purpose to trip him. You never knowed he was comin'."

"Well, no, I didn't exactly," admitted Racey with a sly smile. "Them boots was laid out all special for you."

"For me?"

"For you."

"But why for me?" Perplexedly.

"'Cause, Swing, old settler, I didn't like you this afternoon. The more I seen you over there on that porch the less I liked yuh. So I took off my boots an' hid 'em careful-like behind the wagon-seat so's they'd stick out some an' you'd see 'em an' think I was there asleep, an' naturally you'd go for to wake me up an' wouldn't think o' lookin' behind the crate where I was lyin' for yuh all ready to hop on yore

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neck the second you stooped over the wagon-seat an' give you the Dutch rub for glommin' all the fun this afternoon."

"An' what didja think I'd be doin' alla time?" grinned Swing Tunstall.

"You wouldn't 'a' tried to knife me anyway."

"G'on. He didn't."

"Oh, didn't he? You better believe he did. If I hadn't got a holt of his wrist an' whanged him over the head with my Colt for all I was worth he'd 'a' had me laid out cold. Yep, li'l Mr. Luke Tweezy himself. That rat that don't care nothin' about fightin' with anythin' but a law-book."

"A rat will fight when it's cornered," said Swing.

Racey nodded. "I've seen 'em. It's somethin' to know Luke carries a knife an' where."

"Where?"

"Under his arm. Fill up an' shove the bottle over."

Swing filled abstractedly and slopped the table. He pushed the bottle toward Racey. The latter caught it just in time to prevent a smash on the floor.

"Say, look what yo're doin'!" cried Racey. "Y' almost wasted a whole bottle o' red-eye. I ain't got money to throw away if you have."

"I was just wonderin' what Fat Jakey's plan is," said Swing, scratching his head.

"No use wonderin'," Racey told him. "It's their move."

CHAPTER XI

THE LOOKOUT

"TELL yuh, gents, somethin's come up to change my plans."

It was Jack Harpe speaking. Racey and Swing had met him on the sidewalk in front of Lainey's hotel shortly after supper the following evening, and Racey had told him of their ultimate decision. As he spoke Mr. Harpe braced an arm against the side of the building, crossed his feet and scratched the back of his head.

"I'm shore sorry," he went on, "but I'd like to call off that proposition about you ridin' for me. Coupla men used to ride for me one time are comin' back unexpected. You know. Naturally you know how it is yoreself, I'd like to have these fellers ridin' for me, so if it's alla same to you two gents we'll call it off. But I wanna be fair. You expected a job on my ranch. I told yuh you could have it. I owe you somethin'. What say to a month's wages apiece?"

Racey shook a slow head and hooked his thumbs in his belt.

"You don't owe us nothin'," he told Jack Harpe. "Take back yore gold. We're honest workin' girls ourselves. Of course we may starve but what's that between friends? In words of one syllable, whadda we care for poverty or precious stones?"

Jack Harpe followed this flight of fancy with an uncertain smile.

"Alla same," he said, "I wish you'd lemme give yuh that month's wages. I'd feel better about it. Like I was payin' my bets sort of."

"'T'sall right," nodded Racey Dawson. "We still don't want no money. We're satisfied if you are. Yep, we're a heap satisfied—now. But I ain't contented—much."

"That's tough," commiserated Jack Harpe, and dropped at his side the arm he had braced against the wall of the hotel. Also he straightened his crossed leg. His air and manner, even to the most casual of eyes, took on a sudden brisk watchfulness.

"That's tough," repeated Jack Harpe, and added a head-shake for good measure.

"Ain't it?" Racey Dawson said brightly. "But maybe you can help me out. Lookit, I ain't tryin' to pry, y' understand. I'm the least pryin' feller in four States, but this here ranch of yores, which ain't got nothin' to do with the 88 an' won't cut no corners off-the Bar S, might it by any chance overlap on Mr. Dale's li'l ranch?"

"Overlap the Dale ranch! What you talkin' about?"

"I dunno," Racey replied simply. "I'm tryin' to find out."

Jack Harpe laughed his soundless laugh.

"I dunno what it is to you," he said, "but if my ranch don't come near the Bar S how can it hit the Dale place?"

"Stranger things than that have happened. But still alla same I'd shore not admire to see any hardship come to old Chin Whiskers—Dale, I mean."

If Racey had hoped to gain an effect by mentioning "Chin Whisker" he was disappointed. Jack Harpe was wearing his poker face at the moment.

"I wouldn't like that none myself," concurred Jack Harpe. "Old Dale seems like

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a good feller; sort o' shackles along a mite too shiftless maybe, but his daughter takes the curse off, don't she?"

"We wasn't talkin' about the daughter," Racey pointed out.

Swing Tunstall immediately stepped to one side. There was a something in Racey's tone.

But Jack Harpe did not press the point. He smiled widely instead.

"We wasn't talkin' about her for a fact," he assented. "Comin' right down to cases, we'd oughta be about done talkin', oughtn't we?"

"Depends," said Racey. "It all depends. I'd just like folks to know that I'd take it a heap personal if any tough luck come to old Dale an' his ranch."

"Meanin'?"

"What I said. No more. No less."

"What you said can be took more ways than one."

"Whadda you care?" flashed Racey. "What I said concerns only the gents who are fixin' to cold-deck old Dale. Nobody else a-tall. So whadda you care?"

"I don't. Not a care, not a care. Only—only one thing, Mister Man, if yo're aimin' to dry-nurse old Dale yo're gonna have yore paws most awful full of man's-size work. Leastaways, that's the way she looks to a man up a tree. Lookit, young feller, I'm a great hand for mindin' my own business. But——"

"Yo're like Luke Tweezy thataway," cut in Racey. "That's what he's always doin'."

"Who's Luke Tweezy?"

"So you've learned yore lesson," chuckled Racey. "It was about time. Guess you must 'a' bothered Luke Tweezy some when yuh spoke to him that day in front of the Happy Heart just before you an' Lanpher crawled yore cayuses an' rode to Dale's on Soogan Creek. Don't remember, huh? I do. You said, 'See yuh later, Luke,' an' he didn't say nothin'. Just kep' on untyin' his hoss an' keepin' his head bent down like he hadn't heard a word yuh said. 'S funny, huh?"

"—— funny," assented Jack Harpe with an odd smoothness.

"Yeah, you fellers that don't know each other are all o' that. Tell me somethin'; do yuh meet in the cemetery by a dead nigger's grave in the dark of the moon at midnight or what? I'm free to admit I'm puzzled. She's all a heap too mysterious for me."

"Crazy talk," commented Jack Harpe. "You been wallowin' in the nose-paint an' lettin' yore imagination run on the range too much."

"Maybe," Racey said equably. "Maybe. Yuh can't tell. As a young one I had a powerful imagination. I might have it yet."

Jack Harpe gazed long and silently at Racey Dawson. The latter returned the stare with interest. With the sixth sense possessed by most men who live in a country where the law and the six-shooter are practically synonymous terms, Racey was conscious that Marie, the Happy Heart lookout, had suddenly drifted up to his left flank and now stood with arms akimbo on the inner edge of the sidewalk. Her body was turned partly toward him but her head was turned wholly away. Evidently there was something of interest farther up the street.

Racey moved slightly to the left. He wished to have a little more light on Jack Harpe's right side. The Harpe right hand—it was in the shadow. Jack Harpe pivoted to face Racey. The light from the hotel window fell on the right hand. The member was near the gun-butt, but not suggestively near.

"Listen here," said Jack Harpe suddenly in a snarling whisper designed solely for the ears of Racey Dawson, "I dunno what you been a-drivin' at, but just for yore better information I'm tellin' yuh that I always get what I go after. Whether it's land, cows, horses, or—women, I get what I want. Nothin' ever has stopped me. Nothin' ever will stop me. Don't forget."

"Thanks," smiled Racey. "I'll try not to."

"An' here's somethin' else: What I take I keep—always."

"Always is a long word."

"There's a longer."

"What?"

"Death."

"Meanin'?"

"That folks who ain't for me are against me. Looks like yore friend there wanted to talk to yuh. So long."

ABRUPTLY Jack Harpe faced about and went into the hotel, Racey felt a touch on his arm. He turned to find that Marie had almost bumped into him. Her head was still turned away. One of her hands was groping for

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his arm. Her fingers clutched his wrist, then slid upward to the crook of his elbow.

"Le's go across the street," she said in a breathless voice, and pulled him forward.

Her body as she pulled was pressed tightly against him. She seemed to hang upon him. And all to the discomfort and mental anguish of Racey Dawson. He was no prude. His moral sense had never oppressed him. But this calm appropriation of him was too much. But he accompanied her, for there was Swing Tunstall, an interested observer. Other folk as well were spectators. To shake loose Marie's grip, to run away from her, would make him ridiculous. He continued to accompany the young woman quite as if her kidnaping of him was a matter of course.

In the middle of the street they were halted by the headlong approach of a rapidly driven buckboard. As it swept past in front of them the light of the lantern clamped on the dashboard flashed on their faces.

" 'Lo, Mr. Dawson," cried the driver, her fresh young voice lifting to be heard above the drum of the hoofs and the grind of the rolling wheels. And the voice was the voice of Miss Molly Dale.

Racey did not reply to the greeting. He was too dumbfoundedly aghast at the mischance that had presented him while arm in arm with a person of Marie's stamp to the eyes of one upon whom he was striving to make an impression. What would Molly Dale think? The worst, of course. How could she help it? Appearances were all against him. Then he recalled that she had been the sole occupant of the buckboard—that she had called him by name after the light had fallen on the face of the lookout. It was possible that she might not know who Marie was. Although it was no more than just possible, he cuddled the potentiality to him as if it had been a purring kitten.

He allowed Marie to lead him across the sidewalk and into the pot-black shadow between Tom Kane's house and an empty shack. But here in the thick darkness he paused and looked back to see whether Swing Tunstall were following. Swing was not. He was entering the hotel in company with Windy Taylor.

Marie jerked at his arm.

"C'mon," she urged impatiently. "Gonna take root, or what?"

Willy-nilly he accompanied his captor to the extremely private and secluded rear of Tom Kane's new barn. Here were the remains of a broken wagon, several wheels and the major portion of a venerable and useless stove. Marie released his arm and Racey sat down on the stove. But it was a very useless stove, and it collapsed crashingly under his weight. Later he learned that even when it had been a working member of Tom Kane's menage the stove had been held together mainly by trust in the Lord and a good deal of baling-wire.

"Clumsy!" Marie hissed at him as he arose hurriedly. "All thumbs an' left feet. Why don't yuh make a li'l more noise? I'll bet you could if you tried."

"Lookit," Racey snapped temperishly, for a sharp corner of the stove door had totally obscured his sense of proportion, "lookit, I didn't ask to come over here with you. Whadda you want anyway?"

"Want you to shut up an' pay attention to me," she flung back. "I thought you was gonna leave town. Why ain't you?"

"Changed my mind," was his answer.

"Why can't you do what you said you'd do?" She was quite vehement about it.

"I got a right to change my mind, ain't I?"

"Go, —— it! Why can't you go? You gave them a chance to even up when you ran that blazer on Doc Coffin an' Honey Hoke there in the Starlight. Let it go at that. Whadda you want to hang round here for? Don't you know that every hour you stay here makes it more dangerous for yuh? Oh, you can laugh! That's all you do when a feller does her level best to see yuh don't come to no harm. ——! I could shake you for a fool!"

"Was that what you pulled me alla way over here to tell me?" he inquired, somewhat miffed at her acerbity.

"I pulled you across the street because if I'd left you where I found you you wouldn't 'a' lived a minute." The starlight was bright enough to reveal to him the set and earnest tenseness of her features.

"I wouldn't 'a' lived a minute, huh?" was his comment. "I didn't see nobody round there fit an' able to put in a period."

"It wasn't anybody you could see. Don't you remember what I said about a knife in the night or a shot in the dark? Man, do you have to be killed before yo're convinced?"

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"Well—uh—I——"

"Whadda you guess I was standin' alongside of yuh for while yuh was talkin' to that feller, huh? Tryin' to listen to what yuh was sayin'? Think so, huh?"

"You shore had yore nerve," he said admiringly and helplessly.

"Nerve nothin'!" she denied. "He wouldn't shoot through me. I know that well enought."

"Why wouldn't he? An' how do yuh know?"

"Because, an' I do. That's enough."

"Which particular one is he?"

"I ain't sayin'."

"Do you like him as much as that?" Shrewdly.

"Not the way you mean." Dispassionately.

"Then who is he?"

"I ain't sayin', I tell yuh!"

"You snitched on Nebraska." Persuasively.

"This feller's different."

"How different?"

"None of yore business. Lookit, I'm doin' my best for you, but I won't have the luck every time that I had tonight—nor you won't neither. ——, if I hadn't just happened to strike for a night off this evenin' I dunno where you'd be!"

"Say, I thought you didn't dare let them see you have anythin' to do with me?"

"I didn't, an' I don't. But I hadda. I couldn't set by an' let you be plugged, could I? Hardly."

"But——"

" 'T'sall right, 't'sall right. Don't you worry none about me. I got a ace in the hole if the weather gets wet. But I wanna tell you this: If yo're bound to go on playin' the fool, keep a-movin' an' walk round a lighted window like it's a swamp."

She dodged past him and was gone. He made no move to follow. He pushed back his hat and scratched his head.

"—— of a town this is," he muttered. "Can't stand still no more without havin' some sport draw a fine sight where you'll feel it most."

After she left Racey Dawson Marie diagonalled across Main Street, passed between the dance-hall and Dolan's warehouse and made her way to the most outlying of the half-dozen two-room shacks scattered at the back of the dance-hall. She entered the shack, felt for the matches in the tin tobacco-box nailed against the wall, and struck one to light the lamp. Like the provident miss she was she turned the wick down after lighting in order that the chimney might heat slowly.

It may have been the dimness of the lighted lamp. It may have been that she was not so observing as usual. But certainly she had no inkling of another's presence in the same room with her till she had slipped out of her waist. Then a man in the corner of the room swore harshly.

"—— yore soul to ——," were his remarks in part. "What did you horn in for tonight?"

CHAPTER XII

THE DISCOVERY

RACEY DAWSON did not remain long idle after Marie's departure. The girl had barely entered the narrow passage between the warehouse and the dance-hall before he was crossing the street at a point beyond the jail where there were no shafts of light from open windows and doorways to betray him.

Racey Dawson circled the sheriff's house and tippytoed past the outermost of the six two-room shacks at the rear of the dance-hall. His objective was the Starlight Saloon; his purpose, to discover the bushwhacker who had tried to shoot him.

As he passed the outermost shack a light flashed up within it. He saw Marie's head and shoulders silhouetted against the curtain. He recognized her immediately by the heavy mass of her hair. No other woman in Farewell possessed such a mop.

Racey resolved to speak with Marie again. His hand was lifted in readiness to knock when Marie's visitor spoke. Racey's hand promptly dropped at his side. He had recognized the voice. It was that of Bull, the Starlight bartender.

The shack door was fairly well constructed. At least there were no cracks in it. But a log wall has oftentimes an open chink. This wall had one between the third and fourth tiers of logs, not more than a yard from the door. Racey crouched till his eyes were on a level with the narrow crack.

He could not see Bull. But he could see Marie. Apparently she was not according her visitor the slightest attention. She daintily and unhurriedly hung her waist

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over the back of a chair. Then she turned up the lamp, removed the pins from her abundant hair, shook it down and began to brush it calmly and carefully.

"—— you!" snarled Bull, advancing to the table where he was within range of Racey's eyesight. "I spoke to you! What didja do it for?"

She raised her head and looked at him, the brush poised in one hand.

"—— you, Bull," she drawled at him. "I'm tellin' you, because I felt like it."

Bull shot forth a hand and grabbed her right wrist. Marie, as a whole, did not move. But her left hand dropped languidly and nestled in the overhang of her bodice.

"Bull," she said softly, staring straight into the evil eyes glowering upon her. "Bull, bad as you are, you ain't never laid a hand on me yet. You ain't gonna begin now, are yuh?"

Bull's great fingers began to tighten on her wrist, slowly, inexorably.

"I'm sorry, Bull," she resumed when he made no reply, "but I got a derringer pointin' straight at yore stomach. Now you ain't gonna lemme make a mess on my clean carpet, are you?"

Bull released her wrist as if it burned him.

"You devil!" he exclaimed. "I believe you'd do it."

"Shore, I would," she affirmed serenely, lifting a small and ugly derringer from its place of concealment and balancing it on a pink palm. "I'd drill you in one blessed minute if you don't keep yore paws to home. They's some things, Bull, you can't do to me. An' one o' them things is hurtin' me. I don't believe in corporal punishment, Bull."

"I wanna know what you horned in for," he demanded, pounding the table till the lamp danced again.

"If you only knowed what a silly fool you looked," she commented, "you'd sit down an' take it easy. That's right, tell the neighbors, do! Squawk out good an' loud how yore bushwhackin' li'l killin' turned out a misdeal. Shore, I'd do that if I was you. Whadda you guess they pay Jake Rule an' Kansas Casey for, huh?"

"What did you get in front of him for?" Bull persisted in a lower tone. "I pretty near had him, but you ——, I could wring yore neck!"

"But you won't," she reminded him sweetly. "Lookit here, Bull, if you hadn't locked the door leadin' up the stairs to the Starlight's loft, I'd 'a' come after you there an' done my persuadin' of you right in the loft. As it was when I heard what you were up to — ne' mine how I heard. I heard, that's enough—I hadda go out in the street an' do what I could there. I don't believe the feller liked it much, neither."

"But what's he to you? You ain't soft on him, are yuh, account of what he done for that yellow mutt of yores?"

"I owe him somethin'," she evaded. "That dog—I like that dog. An' then that man treats me like a lady. It ain't every man treats me like a lady."

"I should hope not," guffawed the amiable Bull.

"Now that's a right funny joke," she assured him. "It almost makes me laugh. Still alla same I got feelin's. I'm a human bein'. An' you'll notice molasses catches a heap more flies than vinegar does. I like that Dawson man an' I ain't gonna see him hurt."

"Did you tell him it was me up there with a rifle?" There was a hint of uneasiness in the blustery tone.

"I didn't tell him nothin'," said Marie. "I ain't no snitch."

"Ah-h, you are soft on him," Bull sneered in disgust.

"What if I am?" she flared. "What business is it of yores?"

"What'll Nebraska say?" he proffered.

"Nebraska ——!" she sneered. "Nebraska an' me are through!"

"I know you've split, but that ain't sayin' Nebraska will let yuh go with another gent."

"I'll go with anybody I please, an' neither Nebraska nor you nor any other —— man is gonna stop me. If you think different, try it, just try it! Thassall I ask. This for you an' Nebraska!"

With which she snapped her fingers under his nose once, twice and again.

"I WISH Pap was still alive. He could always handle you. Remember the time you sassed him there in ——"

Here Marie dropped her brush into an empty pail, and the clatter drowned out the name of the town so far as Racey was concerned. But Marie caught the name, for she straightened with a start and stared at Bull.

"Yeah," continued Bull, "you remember

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it, huh? I guess you do. That was where Pap slapped yore chops an' throwed you down the stairs. Like to broke yore neck that time. I wish to —— he had."

"Pap," she repeated. "Pap, an' that town. What made you think of them two names together?"

"'Cause that was the town where he throwed you down the stairs," Bull told her matter-of-factly.

"It was the town where we met up with Bill Smith."

"What about it?"

"Nothin'—only Bill Smith is here in town."

"In Farewell?"

"In Farewell."

"Why ain't I seen him if he's in Farewell?"

"Because he's shaved off all o' that beard an' part of his eyebrows. They used to meet plumb in the middle, remember—till a body would hardly know him. I didn't. I knowed they was somethin' familiar about him but I couldn't tell what till you mentioned Pap an' the town together. Then I knowed. Yeah, Bull, this gent's the same Bill Smith Pap picked up on the trail. He's a respectable member of society now, I guess. Calls himself Jack Harpe an' spends most of his time runnin' round with Lanpher."

"Then he ain't too respectable, the lousy pup. Calls himself Jack Harpe, huh? Shore, he come in the Starlight with Lanpher an' gimme the eye without a quiver. Didn't know me, he didn't. An' I ain't done nothin' to my looks to change 'em."

"Huh, y' oughta seen the way he looked me up an' down when he passed us on the Marysville trail. You'd 'a' thought he just seen me. Oh, he's got his nerve."

"Who is us?" Suspiciously.

"What it won't do yuh no good to know. I guess I can go ridin' with a friend if I like. You seem to keep forgettin' you ain't got no ropes on me—nary a rope. Stop botherin' yore fool head about me an' my doin's, an' think of somethin' worth while—for instance, Jack Harpe."

"Then what?"

"No wonder they call you Bull. That's all you are, beef to the heels an' no more sense than a calf. Listen, Jack Harpe's respectable, ain't he? Or he aims to be, which is the same thing. Anyway he's swellin' round here like a poisoned pup an' don't know us a-tall. Takin' him down a couple o' pegs wouldn't hurt him. He always was too tall. I'll bet if he was come at right he'd pay cash down on the hoof for us, me an' you both, to keep our heads shut about what we know."

"But we was in that too."

"But we didn't do what he done," pointed out Marie. "An' you know yoreself the company don't drop the case like a ordinary sheriff does. No, I expect Jack Harpe would be worried some if he knowed we'd recognized him. Aw, what are you scared of? Pap's dead, ain't he? How can Harpe hurt us? He never knowed how intimate we knowed Pap while he was stayin' at our house. He just thought Pap was a friend. He never knowed we got our share of the money. Nawsir, he can't hook us up with that killin' nohow, but we can hook him. Brace up to him, Bull. Maybe you can work him for a stake. They ain't no danger, I keep tellin' yuh."

"By ——, I'd like to!" declared Bull and swore a string of oaths.

"Then go ahead," urged Marie. "An' don't forget I want to get in on the stake."

"Ah-h, I do all the work an' then have to whack up with you, huh? I will not. What I get I keep."

"I remember Jack Harpe used to say that. He shore hated himself, the poor feller. Alla same, I guess maybe you'll go even-Steven with me, Bull. Who is it recognized him first? Who give you the idea? Who did, huh? Who did? Whatever you get you'll divide with me or I'll know the reason why. An' if you don't think I'm a wildcat get me roused, man get me roused."

Bull stood back and scratched a tousled head. "I—well—" he began and paused. Obviously the prospect did not wholly please him.

"Go to Jack Harpe easy-like," suggested the girl. "Don't tell him too much, just enough to show yo're meanin' what yuh say. I'd do it myself only he'd laugh at me. He's one of those gents a woman has to shoot before they'll believe she's in earnest. He ain't the only one; they's another just like him in town. Ne' mine who. You go to Jack Harpe. He'll listen to a man. G'on! They's money in it if you work it right. You want money, don't yuh? You need three hundred to pay what yuh owe Piggy Wadsworth, don't yuh? Yah, you

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big hunk, you been runnin' to me for money long enough! Here's a chance to make some of yore own. Fly at it."

When Bull had picked up a rifle standing in a corner and departed, slamming the door behind him, Marie sat down on the lid of a mottled zinc trunk and wiped her hot face on a petticoat that hung on the wall conveniently to hand.

"Warm work, warm work!" she muttered wearily. "I dunno when I seen Bull so mad. I shore thought one time there I wasn't gonna get rid of him without a fight."

She rolled her well-shaped ankles and flipped the gilt tassels on her shoe-tops to and fro. Yes, indeed, women wore tasseled footgear in those days.

"Men," she went on, staring down at the shiny tassels, "men are shore ——"

CHAPTER XIII

A BOLD, BAD MAN

BULL had halted a moment outside the door of the shack to roll a cigaret. Before he pulled out his tobacco-bag he leaned the rifle against the door-jamb. His eyes, unaccustomed to the darkness, did not see the crouching Racey Dawson within arm's length.

Both of Bull's hands were cupped round the lighted match. He lifted it to the end of the cigaret. He sucked in his breath and —a voice whispered—

"Drop that match an' grab yore ears."

Bull did not hesitate to obey, for the broad, cold blade of a bowie rested lightly against the back of his neck. Bull swayed a little where he stood.

"I got yore rifle," resumed the whisperer. "Walk away now. Yo're headin' about right. Don't make too much noise."

Bull did not make too much noise. In fact he made hardly any. It is safe to say that he never progressed more quietly in his life. The man with the bowie steered him to a safe haven behind a fat white boulder half-buried in sumac.

"Si' down," requested the captor in a conversational tone. "We can be right comfortable here."

"Dawson!" breathed the captive.

"Took yuh a long time to find it out," said Racey Dawson. "Si' down I said," he added sharply.

Bull obeyed, his back against the rock and was careful not to lower his hands. Racey hunkered down and sat on a spurless heel. The rifle was under his knee. He had exchanged the bowie for a six-shooter. The firearm was trained in the general direction of Bull's stomach.

Racey smiled widely. He felt very chipper and pleased with himself. He was managing the affair well, he thought.

"You show up right plain against that white rock," he remarked. "If yo're figurin' to gamble with me, think o' that."

"Whatcha want?" demanded Bull sullenly.

"Lots o' things," replied Racey, shifting a foot an inch to the left. "I'm the most wantin' feller you ever see. Just now this minute I want you to tell me where it was yuh met up with Bill Smith an' what it was he done so bad that you an' Marie think yuh got a hold on him."

"You was listenin' quite a while," muttered Bull.

"Quite a while," admitted Racey Dawson. "Quite a while."

"But you didn't listen quite hard enough," suggested Bull.

"No," assented Racey, "I didn't. I'm expectin' you to sort of fill in the gaps."

Bull shook a decided head.

"No," he denied. "No, you got another guess comin'. I won't do nothin' like that a-tall."

"An' why not?"

" 'Cause I won't."

" 'Won't' got his neck broke one day just 'cause he wouldn't."

"Yeah, I guess so," sneered Bull.

"You must forget I heard all about how you tried to bushwhack me from the second floor of the Starlight," Racey put in gently.

"Aw, that's a —— lie," bluffed Bull. "A —— lie. All a mistake. You heard wrong."

Racey shook a disapproving head. "When it's after the draw," he said, "an' you ain't got nothin' in yore hand, an' the other gents have everythin' an' know they have everythin' to yore nothin', she's poor poker to make a bluff. Whatsa use, sport, whatsa use?"

"I dunno what yo're talkin' about," persisted Bull.

"Aw right, let it go at that. Who put you up to bushwhack me?"

"Nun-nobody," hesitated Bull.

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"Yore own idea, huh?"

Bull spat disgustedly on the grass. He had seen the trap after it had been sprung.

"You shore can't play poker," smiled Racey, his eyes shining with pleasure under the wide brim of his hat. "I—the Starlight's pretty bright, remember."

Bull's sudden movement came to naught. He settled back, his eyes furtively busy.

"Still alla same," pursued Racey, "I wonder was it all yore own idea."

"What the —— didja kick me for?" snarled Bull.

"Kick you for," Racey repeated stupidly.

"Yeah, kick me," said Bull. "No —— man can kick me an' me not take notice."

"Dunno as I blame yuh. Dunno as I do. If any —— man kicks you, Bull, you got a right to drill him every time. An' you think I kicked yuh?"

"I know yuh did."

"You know I did, huh? Did yuh see me do it?"

"You kicked me after yuh'd knocked me silly with that bottle. Kicked me when I was down an' couldn't help myself."

"So I done all that to yuh after yuh was down. Who told yuh?"

"Nev' mine who told me. You done it; that's enough."

"No, it ain't enough. It ain't enough by a long mile. I wanna know who told yuh?"

"I ain't sayin'." Sullenly.

"Come to think, she's hardly necessary. Doc Coffin an' Honey Hoke was the only two gents in the Starlight at the time. It was either one or both of 'em told yuh. Maybe I'll get a chance to ask 'em about it later. Now I dunno whether yuh'll believe it or not but to tell the truth an' be plain with yuh, Bull, I didn't kick yuh."

"I don't believe yuh." But Bull's tone was not confident.

"I wouldn't expect yuh to—under the circumstances. What I'm tellin' yuh is true alla same. Lookit, you fool, is it likely after takin' the trouble to knock yuh down, I'd kick yuh besides? Do I look like a sport who'd do a thing like that? Think it over."

Bull was silent, but Racey believed that he had planted the seed of doubt in his mind.

"An' another thing," resumed Racey, "do I look like a sport who'd let another jigger lay for him promiscuous? You go slow, Bull. I'm good-natured, a heap good-natured. But don't lemme catch you bushwhackin' me again."

"I won't," said Bull with a flash of humor.

"Be dead shore of it," cautioned Racey. "If I ever get to even thinkin' that yo're layin' for me, Bull, I'm liable to come a-askin' questions you can't answer. Yo're a bright young man, Bull, but you wanna be careful how you strain yore intellect. You might need it some day. An' if you wanna keep on bein' mother's li'l helper, be good, thassall, be good."

"Yo're worse'n a —— dodger," affirmed Bull.

"You got me sized up right. I'm worse than a —— dodger, a whole lot worse." The words were playful but the tone was sardonic.

BULL grunted.

"You tell me, will yuh, just where it was yuh met this Bill Smith-Jack Harpe feller, an' what it was he done? There's a company in it, too. What company is it—the Northern Pacific?"

"Ah-h, you got a gall, you have," sneered Bull savagely. "Think you'll make somethin' out of Harpe yore own self, huh?"

"That is my idea," admitted Racey.

"Well, you got a gall, thassall I gotta say."

"You forget you got a gall too when you try to bushwhack me," Racey reminded him. "I'm tryin' to play even for that."

"Try away."

"You seem to make it hard for me, kind of," grinned Racey.

"Of course I'd enjoy makin' it easy for yuh all I could," observed Bull sarcastically.

"I dunno as I'd go so far as to say that," was the Dawson comment. "But maybe it's possible to persuade yuh to tell me what yuh know."

"It ain't."

"S'pose I decided to leave yuh here."

"You won't." Confidently.

"Why not?"

"'Cause you ain't shootin' a unarmed man."

"Yet you think I'm the boy to kick one that's down."

"Sometimes I change my mind," said Bull with a harsh laugh.

"You laugh as loud as that again," said Racey irritably, "an' you'll change somethin' besides yore mind. Don't be too

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trustin' a Jake, Bull, not too trustin'. I might surprize you yet. About that information now—I want it."

"If anybody's gonna make money out of Harpe, I am." Thus Bull, stubbornly.

"I ain't aimin' to make money out of Harpe. What I'm figurin' to make out of him is somethin' else again."

"Whatsa use o' lyin' thataway? Don't——"

"That'll be about all," interrupted Racey. "You've called me a liar enough for one night. I ain't got all kinds of patience. You gonna tell me what I wanna know?"

"No I ain't."

"Yo're mistaken. Yo're gonna tell me or yo're gonna leave town."

"Leave town!"

"Yep, leave town, go away from here, far, far away. So far away that you won't be able to blackmail Jack Harpe. See? Yore knowledge won't be worth a whoop to yuh then. An' I'll find out what I wanna know from Marie."

"She'll never tell."

"Oh, I guess she will," said Racey, but he knew in his heart that worming information out of Marie would not be easy. Saving his life was one thing, but giving up information with a money-value would be quite another. The amiable Marie was certainly not working for her health.

"Yo're welcome to what yuh can get out of her," said Bull.

"Then you'll be startin' tonight. From here we'll go get yore hoss an' see you safely on yore way."

"What'll you gimme to tell yuh?" inquired the desperate Bull.

"Nothin'—not a thin dime, feller. C'mon, let's go.''

"Nun-no, not yet. I—say. s'pose you lemme talk to Jack Harpe first myself. Just you lemme get my share out of him, an' I'll tell yuh all yuh wanna know."

"When you goin' to him?" Racey demanded suspiciously.

"Tonight if I can find him. It ain't so late. But tomorrow anyway."

"I'll give yuh till sundown tomorrow night. If you ain't ready to tell me then you'll have to drift."

"Maybe, maybe not," sneered Bull.

"I've said it," Racey said shortly, rising to his feet. "There's no ropes on yuh. Skip—Ne'mine yore Winchester. She's all right where she is. So long, Bull, so long."

TO BE CONTINUED

THE DESERT

By Ira South

LET no man say I deal in artifice.
Alluring guise of loveliness I scorn,
To lead men on into my arid grasp.
I plainly set my gates with grit and thorn.

Yet solitary suitors brave my moods,
Though fusing noonday sun may scar the eye,
And aching throat grow dry, and parch, and crack
With powdered dust of acrid alkali.

For to the faithful I make recompense.
I raise up old familiar ghosts again,
And there be those who would commune with these,
Men stolid to my earnest fee of pain.

Yea—from out remote and distant days
My silences are trod with fantom feet,
And long hushed vibrant voices whisper low
With night winds in the cactus and mesquite.

I yield no soft caresses to the flesh,
Nor lure a lover onward, passion-blind.
Weigh these matters well before ye choose
To seek in me such things as ye may find.

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EVERY MAN'S HAND

By Captain Dingle

Author of "The Liar," "The Harpooner," etc.

ONLY a touch of imagination was needed to persuade an observer that the great blazing disk of the setting sun was a laughing face, a sardonic face laughing fatly at the squat little steamer and her squat little skipper and all her squat little affairs.

Perhaps Old Sol had reason to laugh as he slowly sank down behind the lush, frowning North Borneo jungle after a day spent in sight of Captain Joab Fisher and the steamship *Joppa*. For Joab was well pleased himself, and when his fat little, red little face, within its cute little fringe of white whiskers, and his sharp little blue eyes, which always looked as if made to twinkle but forced by circumstances to glare, showed outward and visible pleasure, it was somehow communicated with radio speed to the ship and all about her.

For experience had taught men with whom Joab Fisher had dealings that when he seemed most pleased they must watch for squalls. It should not have been, for the old man was cut out of a lump of jollity by a gleeful chisel, but some crank in his make-up— But that's the yarn.

As the sun dipped below the black treetops of Sandakan, the skipper slapped down a book he was reading on the skylight and—

"Haw, haw, haw!" he roared. "Haw, haw, haw-w-wr! If that ain't a passel o' hawg-wash I'll eat the fo'csle duff! Hey, Dan, Mr. Treweeks!" he bawled, tears of mirth ready to drop from his little blue eyes upon his fat little red cheeks.

The chief mate turned at the bridge-end, not a moment before, as became his dignity, and preserved his duty pace until he reached abreast of the skipper.

"Did ye hail me, sir?" he inquired in a colorless tone which his colorful appearance gave the lie to.

"Did I —? Oh, —— yer sool, Dan! Hark at this, will ya?" Captain Joab picked up the book again, turned the pages with heavy finger, and, bending in the swift gathering dusk, read the little story of brave Prince de Lambesc. He made a synopsis of it for the mate's ears:

"Heaves in sight o' this house afire, this-yer prince feller do, and the old woman inside is yellin' her fool head off, o' course. In goes Mr. Prince Lambex, lugs out the old gal blazing like mad, and what does he do? Why—Haw—haw, haw-w-wr! Oh, glory, Dan! Gits her out o' the fire all shipshape and Bristol-fashion, then heaves her into the duck-pond to douse her burnin' clothes, and drowns her, by golly! Haw, haw, haw-aw-aw!"

Chief Mate Dan Treweeks stared fixedly ahead for a full minute after the story was finished. He was strikingly like the skipper in build, feature and jovial aspect, except that in his case the twinkle which ought to be in his blue eyes was there in actuality though somewhat overcast by a shadow as he answered in heavy syllables:

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"Seems a good yarn, that it do, Cap'n Fisher. That there prince feller goes and saves the old ooman, man-fashion, and if he only went to work and rolled the old gal in the grass, or his coat, he'd ha' saved her alive. But he's a clever swab, like some more I knows of. He ain't the sort of bloke to be satisfied with no or'nary way o' doing things. Has to heave her in the pond to douse the flames an' up an' drownds the pore old thing. Seems like you might take warnin' by——"

"—— yer sool, Dan Treweeks, shet up!" shouted Cap'n Joab furiously, and flung down the companionway to his room, breathing fire and brimstone upon the world in general and nosey chief mates in particular; especially one Daniel Treweeks. Dan permitted his twinkling eyes to follow the skipper in an instantaneous flash of amusement, then turned away and beamed placidly at the gaudy corona of the departed sun.

Joab Fisher was a puzzle to most men, had puzzled all with whom he came in contact ever since his oldest acquaintance could remember. He had sorely puzzled his patient, indulgent old wife, too. She wanted nothing more than to forget the many and bewildering changes that had come over him and to live in the memory of those care-free days when he had married her on the wages of a coastwise skipper in good employ. Only since becoming an owner himself had he changed so utterly as to estrange friends and almost wreck her abiding faith.

No doubt the keenness of the competition helped to bring it about, for independent trading on the coasts of North Borneo was a precarious business at best; its big profits gained only at the cost of unceasing vigilance as regarded native authority and competing traders; and some of his strongest competitors had already earned names to be whispered in other fields before appearing along his newly opened routes.

Having built up, by hard work and luck, to say nothing of the cleverness to which he fondly attributed it all, a goodly trade in ebony and gutta-percha, saving port bills by dealing direct with the coast villages, and sometimes escaping the infliction of customs dues on his return cargoes by using the same avenues, Captain Joab developed along with his trade a sort of fictitious cunning which he fondly believed to be the real thing, and which he was convinced was entirely necessary to protect him against unscrupulous rivals.

Which was all very well out on the coast; but he should not have carried that newly acquired cunning home to his simple-minded spouse. It was all very well to believe every man's advances to mean intention to best him, and to match his cunning against theirs before he gave them the advantage by receiving those advances as friendly; but it was not very well to make dear old Sally's eyes water suspiciously by gruffly repulsing *her* fond advances after six months' absence, with the growled-out demand:

"What d'ye want this time, huh? Ain't gettin' anythin' for nawthin' these days, I ain't. Be bound there's a noo dress or a fresh bunnet or some'at back o' all this yer slobberin' and huggin' mush, my gal."

That had been his attitude last trip home to Queensland, and it had brought swift results in its train. Loyal old Sally Fisher had her share of pride, as well as more than her share of long-suffering affection, and, after one long, penetrating inspection of her man's round, white-fringed face, she resigned herself to his new moods and gave him no further offense by making overtures for affection.

THAT had been a year ago. The broad end of the wedge had followed the point, as inevitably as distrust follows suspicion. Long before that month's shore-leave was up Sally left her spouse, so sadly changed, and went to reside with her brother, the doctor, in a tidy, snug little bachelor bungalow just outside the seaport town, where she found plenty to distract her thoughts in caring for the busy doctor's cows and sheep, goats and geese, turkeys and chickens.

Joab grinned at first; then, in keeping with his newly acquired character, he decided that his wife and the doctor were in league against him. Manfully he marched up to confound honest Thomas. The cheerful old medico was too much for him and he retreated in disorder. But he was not so badly defeated that he could not think, and as he plunged along the pasture back of the bungalow toward the road where stood his hired wagonette, a low, rumbling *mool* sent the spark of a plot directly to his receptive brain.

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"Moo, yourself!" he replied, stopping and peering toward the bovine voice. Inside a hurdle fence a shaggy head, horned like Taurus himself, swayed slowly to and fro; a pair of round, glistening eyes shone in the bright starlight, bent upon him with a devilish expression, as he swiftly decided. For a moment he peered this way and that, taking in the lay of the land; then, measuring his distance from the road to the fence with a keen eye, he fumbled with the hurdle fastenings, flung down the gate and leaped clumsily but quickly for his wagon.

"There, darn ye both!" he growled, whipping up his horse. "That chap'll bump ye some, I reckon!" And the *moo* of the suddenly released beast followed him down the breeze.

But his little pleasantry went adrift, as he discovered by chance when a letter from Thomas was delivered to him on his ship's bridge as he steamed out of the harbor. He had fondly believed that the released bull would pretty well ruin things around that bungalow, even if nothing worse happened; and it was possible—his lips dripped sweetness at the thought of it—that a bull and a doctor in sudden, unexpected collision might produce results not exactly fattening for the doctor.

Oh well! As previously remarked, that was a year ago. That letter had told him lots; had told him of his mistake in taking it for granted that the doctor must necessarily be the victim of his unmanly trick. It had told him that his plot had only resulted in getting poor, lovable old Sally bumped into bed with a shock which promised to linger long with her at her age. For further information, all through that year regular bills from Thomas the doctor for care of Sally Fisher, Joab's lawful wife, kept the skipper in ever fresh memory of his last visit home.

To Joab's credit it may here be said that he paid those bills, swollen as they seemed to him, and paid as regularly the allowance Sally had demanded as her right. But the affair, with its resultant liabilities, did nothing to lessen the hardness which had long been creeping into his character.

WE LEFT Captain Joab in the cabin, still hot from the mate's shrewd hit at him. Two hours later he mounted to the bridge, to find the steamer slicing her placid way through a sea like black, star-dusted satin, with the loom of Borneo black on the port hand, a moon some days past full just popping out of the sea over toward Mindanao and a sea horizon astern, bare of the lights of ships. At the land, the stars, the moon he glanced disinterestedly; at the shipless horizon he beamed ruddily, slapping his plump thigh with a pudgy fat hand.

"Fooled him, Dan, didn't we?" he chuckled to the mate.

"We're ahead o' the *Gannet* so far, if that's what y' mean," retorted Dan without enthusiasm.

"Betcher we're ahead o' the old duck! Reckon yer uncle Joab's slow, hey? —— yer sool, Dan! Why'n —— can't y' say somethin'?"

The skipper's beaming grin faded and he glowered at the dark shape of Dan. Slowly the mate swung on his heel at the end of the bridge, and remarked as he approached Joab—

"Hope our coal hangs out, that's all Cap'n Fisher."

Captain Fisher laughed, long and low and fatly.

"Don't worry about coal, Danny lad," he whispered when the fat chuckles ceased shaking him. "Just keep a good eye liftin' out astern, and tell Mr. Colly to do allee samee when he relieves you, and let me know the minute the *Gannet* shows her dirty smoke above the horizon. I'm tellin' the chief gradually to slow her down toward mornin', Dan, to give old Trumbull a chance to overhaul us——"

"Huh!" snapped the mate angrily. "Don't it ever strike y' that maybe Dan Treweeks ain't workin' against y'? Ain't I been a proper mate to y' ever since y' had a ship, Joab Fisher? If I ain't, if y' got the notion I ain't to be trusted, why'n —— don't y' say so like a sailorman? I c'd get out quicker'n an eel out o' greasy hands."

"Now what's bitin' ye?" blared Joab, wide of eye and red of face. He was utterly amazed at the mate's mild outburst, so absolutely amenable to all his wishes had Dan been hitherto, never asking questions, always keen about his duty. "Who's gassin' about firin' y' out, huh? Ain't gone muckstruck wi' the full moon, be ye?"

"I'll tell y' what's the matter, in one act, Cap'n Joab," retorted Dan viciously. "This yer's it: Fust of all you ain't got no call to think y' have to play clever to whip

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Cap'n Trumbull. He's a real good old scout, is Trumbull, an' well you know it, and every other man tradin' these seas knows it too. How many times has he asked y' to j'ine in alonga him, shipshape and Bristol-fashion? I tell y' you'll cut yer own silly throat tryin' to swizzle him out o' something he's willin' for ye to have.

"Look at the —— fool trick y're pullin' now, Joab Fisher! You goes to work and runs past Sandakan without coalin', when you knows right well y' ain't got coal enough to carry us round to Marudu Bay. And y' knows right well the *Joppa* c'd have coaled and left Sandakan same time as that old *Gannet* and beat her honest if t'was necessary, which it ain't. Now we're slowin' down already. What it's all about is what I'd like to know—such pigswiggled nonsense!"

Captain Joab stood for a moment shaking with inward chuckles, regarding his incensed mate with humorous eyes, before he replied:

"Danny, me boy, y' ain't so smart as y' think y' are. Don't I know we can beat the *Gannet* steamin'? But I know, as well, that Trumbull's bunkers are fuller than mine, and he ain't callin' in at Sandakan!"

"Then he'll beat us there anyhow. And here y' are, slowin' down already. Such dumfoolishness! Ain't no call for it, either; that's the part that jerks my braces!"

"All you know, *Mister* Treweeks; all you know," grinned the skipper sarcastically. "Wait and see, sir, is my advice; and in the mean time just remember my orders and see you carry 'em out."

"That I'll do 'cause it's my duty, Cap'n Fisher," retorted the mate sharply. "But I'll remember, too, that all yer clever fandangos don't pull down coconuts. I ain't forgot hearin' somethin' about a bull what got loose——"

"Shet up, 'fore I log y' for insubord'nation!" roared the skipper, almost apoplectic with rage. He stumbled headlong down the cabin stairs to the saloon, drank up all the cool water in the chattie and entered his small stateroom in a white heat of unpleasant remembrance.

"—— dum th' man!" he muttered, shaking a fist up at the deck in the general direction of the unconscious Dan. "Why'n —— did he want to heave that in my face again?"

For once in a very long time Captain Fisher was unable to sleep. Never since leaving his forsaken home a year ago had he been entirely free from the specter of his nasty action. Stoutly he had fought against memory, but his victory was only apparent, not at all real; for while he attained to outward peace and tranquillity, and though he had convinced himself that he had only done what any other man would have done if provoked as he had been, he had discovered the true depth to which old Sally had penetrated into his heart.

For all his ingrowing perversity, all his fondly imagined cunning, all his rising self-esteem, his loyal old spouse was ever in his thoughts and would not out. Only by bracing himself and fighting harder was he able to carry on in the way he had elected to follow. And now Dan Treweeks had upset with one little sentence, and that but half-completed, all his carefully built-up defenses of assumed callousness.

"I'll put th' sassy old fool back in his place soon's we get in," he muttered.

Then, unable to sleep, he fell to work checking up his accounts.

ALONG the shores of Marudu Bay, and down North Borneo west coast as far as Brunei, he had established his profitable trade. Other skippers traded there too, as naturally they would, seeing that the territory was dripping with valuable cargoes, and there was always the chance of picking up a bit of gold, or a diamond or ruby or so; but Captain Joab Fisher had fallen into a habit of considering the whole coast-line his private stamping-ground, although Trumbull of the *Gannet* was there first, carried bigger cargoes and knew the waters better than the Sea Dyaks themselves.

Time after time Ben Trumbull had made overtures with a view to pooling interests; his steamer and the *Joppa* were the only real sea-going steamers in the trade, and while profits were large, so also were the risks, and by combining interests it would be possible to have one ship on the coast collecting and protecting goods while the other was away on a voyage disposing of the last cargo.

But Joab knew too much for that. In the suggestion he detected guile, black guile of the old *shaitan* himself. Even in Trumbull's latest hint, that he, Trumbull, was negotiating with the Sultan of Brunei for a big strip of land facing on Brunei Bay

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and had already established a solid agency down in Banjermassin, where it was not entirely unknown for Landak diamonds to be picked up at times, Joab saw only a brazen attempt to frighten him away from the pickings.

At present he was bound to Marudu Bay for a cargo, after having disposed of a nice bill o' lading of ebony to a Dutchman down in Java, and he meant to show Ben Trumbull once for all that the *Joppa* was big enough and able enough to do all the trading called for in those seas.

Flipping over some bills from the previous voyage, he uncovered the last bill from Doctor Thomas for attendance on Joab's wife. There was a curt professional letter with the bill, which caused Joab's plump red lips to pucker as if he had bitten into a green lime. It was so unlike what one would expect from genial, kindly old Doctor Thomas.

It has been necessary for Mrs. Fisher to take automobile rides daily to provoke appetite. See enclosed bill from garage. Instruct whether you wish this arrangement to go on, or if you prefer to have your wife purchase a car. Beg to remain, etc.,

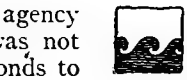
Yours truly.

P. S. In our opinion the latter would be cheaper in the end.

"Cheaper in the end! Oh, Lord!" groaned Joab, running his stubby fingers through his towseled hair in despair. "For th' love o' Noah, how long is she goin' to play up that bit of a toss the old bull give her? Robbery, it is, by gorry! Wait 'till I get my hooks on to that poultice-mixin' brother o' hers! I'll tell him which'll be best!"

But thought of his vengeance only brought Sally before his mental vision more vividly. He couldn't stand it. It threatened to pierce his armor of cunning selfishness, which was after all not armor of proof, perhaps.

"I'll settle with Trumbull first, by gorry!" he muttered, and at once his thoughts swung into pleasanter channels. Once more wearing the fat, round smirk of anticipation, he mounted to the bridge as the watches were being changed and heard his orders passed from old Dan to the second mate in a tone which convinced him that, whatever the mate might think privately, he meant to carry out his duty without deviation.



IT LACKED an hour of early dawn when a white light bobbed up astern, followed soon by the red and green sidelights which indicated a steamer approaching head-on. The coast still lay like a sleeping black giant to port, distant and vague. The moon, low in the west, alone served to mark the border between forest and sky. Captain Joab peered at the lights astern long enough to make sure that they belonged to the *Gannet*, then, ringing the slowed-down engines to a stop, he called down the speaking-tube and gave an order to the chief engineer. The chief replied, and in a moment the skipper became imbued with the animation of a puppet on strings. Dan Treweeks, whose watch had come around again, stared in suspicious wonder at the order which was yelled at him:

"Tie down the whistle-cord, Mr. Treweeks, and start a tar-barrel blaze. Quick!"

The mate repeated the order, sea-fashion, and went about his task, though bewildered by the order, as well he might be, seeing no cause for making signals of distress. The ship had steam, was proceeding, though slowly, up to the moment the engines stopped, and the land lay close aboard.

But the whistle was blaring hoarsely, a tar-barrel blaze soon shot skyward, and presently from the lights astern or their vicinity came a blast answering theirs. Captain Joab leaped agilely to the rail and untied the whistle-cord, letting the screaming sound slowly die out and cease.

"Can't keep on yellin' when we can't make steam, can we?" he chuckled, winking slowly in Dan's vacant face. Dan had cast out all wonder, all interest in his captain's sudden vagaries, and stood by, a plain, cold, emotionless machine for the carrying out of orders.

And astern came the *Gannet*. The stars paled and the eastern horizon lightened from gray to blue and from blue to the silvery glare preceding the sun, as the steamer foamed alongside, and Ben Trumbull on the bridge, still clad in his pajamas, looking like a jovial sea-god with his rumpled hair and ruddy face, hailed through the megaphone with a bull-like roar of good-fellowship:

"Hullo, Joab! What's up with old *Joppa!* Thought you'd beat us in to Marudu, that I did. Want something?"

"Yes, Captain Trumbull, I want a tow," Joab shouted back. "Thought I had coal

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enough without calling in at Sandakan. Dum fool of an engineer! Can't pay ye much, though. Cargoes haven't been none too good."

"Don't be afraid, old fellow," laughed Trumbull heartily. He knew well enough how heavy Joab's cargoes had been. "I'll tow you to an anchorage for nothing. Pay me back some time when I need a hand. Give us your line."

Joab could scarcely contain himself for joy, so easily had his rival fallen into the trap. He concealed his elation, however, and put on a lugubrious face.

"I haven't got a line that's any good. Can't ye send us yours?"

"Oh, I suppose so," Trumbull shouted back, and now there was a trace of irritation in his voice which he tried, however, to keep back. "Stand by, then!"

A seaman shot over a heaving-line with a throwing blood-knot in the end to make it carry, and to the end of this was bent the big towing-hawser.

"Have a man at the bitts, cap'n," Trumbull suggested. "I haven't got any too much coal myself, and may have to cast you adrift in a hurry. I'll do the best I can for you, anyhow."

"I'll see about castin' ye off, never fear," grinned Joab, and stuck an elbow jocularly into the ribs of amazed Dan Treweeks.

Great volumes of black smoke swirling from her funnel told of the extra effort demanded of the *Gannet's* engines as she took up the strain of the tow. Breakfast-time came, and Joab spent as much time in mysterious calculations as he did over his food in the chart-room afterward. While the coast rolled slowly past and little islands began to loom up ahead, parallel rulers and dividers were ever busy plotting off distances and courses as if it were the *Joppa* instead of the *Gannet* which was doing the navigating. And a tiny feather of steam at the steam-pipe seemed to indicate that the *Joppa*, while so helpless as to require towing, had still the means at hand to keep steam in her boilers.

Dan Treweeks said nothing. He looked on stolidly as the northern headlands were raised and dropped astern; he made no sign that he understood when the *Gannet's* speed perceptibly slackened just as Mallavalle Island crept up over the horizon ahead.

But Joab watched keenly from the shelter of the chart-room door, and a smirk of cunning triumph marred his fat red face when he saw Captain Ben Trumbull stop at the end of his bridge, gaze ahead and astern with a doubtful air, then step down and walk rapidly aft with his megaphone in hand. He had spoken to his mate as he left the bridge, and the *Gannet* had stopped, leaving the *Joppa* slowly to creep up to her on the sagging tow-rope.

"Got to turn you loose, Cap'n Fisher," shouted Trumbull. "Sorry, old hoss, but my own coal's low. Just about enough left to carry me in at half-speed. I'll pluck you inside the roads at Mallavillc if you like. There's lots of wood there."

Joab, grinning like a gorilla with a juicy fawn in his claws, spoke down his engine-room tube before replying; then he snapped an order to the mate, who directed some seamen to go and cast off the tow-rope. When the big rope splashed into the water Joab slammed over the engine-room telegraph to "Full Speed Ahead!" and then, not before, did he reply to the astounded Ben Trumbull.

"Right y' are, old top! Thanks for the leg-up. I got enough coal, I find, to take me in now. So long!"

On the *Gannet's* bridge stood a chief and second mate, both purple with rage at the trick played on them. Seamen cursed old Joab Fisher as they hauled in the heavy hawser. On Trumbull's big brown face was the look of a child who suddenly sees the big rubber balloon he has blown up burst in his face. Then a broad, amused smile suffused his features, and he turned to his own telegraph, chuckling shakily as if he saw and appreciated the joke which his mates would gladly do murder to repay.

As the *Joppa* forged past, Joab waved airily, and Dan Treweeks caught a word or two of the subdued tirade that issued from his lips:

"That's another trick to Joab Fisher, by gorry! I'll show 'em they can't fool me! Every one of 'em is trying to best me. Every man's hand——"

"The eternal old jackass!" growled Dan in disgust and took himself off to the far end of the bridge to cool down.

THE *Joppa* lay securely at anchor off the first of Joab's list of likely trading-villages when the *Gannet* limped along on the last scraps of slaty Indian coal scraped from the bunker-stringers

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with searching fingers. From time to time he and Trumbull had dropped small parcels of coals ashore here, in preparation for such an emergency as now came upon them. Joab had already ordered the village headman to carry out several canoe-loads of coal, when the *Gannet's* anchor went down and Trumbull passed under the *Joppa's* stern in his boat, bound ashore on the same errand—coal.

"Better hold on before you start taking in cargo, Joab," Trumbull hailed with a pleasant grin.

Joab glared down at him.

"Ho, better hold on, had I?" he jeered. "And maybe I'd better hold on before I take in coal, hey? Fat chance you got, Trumbull, to bulldoze——"

"Don't get fretful, Joab. Half that coal's yours, so go ahead and ship your share. You played me a sweet little trick, old hoss, and I'd like to play one off on you for it, but I'm afraid it can't be done now. Our courses run apart, see?"

"What'n —— d'ye mean?" roared Joab, leaning over the rail in imminent danger of toppling into the sea. "Courses run apart! They don't unless you're quittin' the game with cold feet. I ain't quittin'."

"No, I'm not quitting, either," came back the gentle reply as the boat passed on. "I've got the concession to trade the shores of this bay for the company, and another concession from the Sultan himself for the privileges down in Brunei Bay. Show you the papers if you'll stop on board the *Gannet* for dinner presently."

Joab was threatened with sudden collapse for some moments, through anger and heat. He thought Trumbull was bluffing him until the headman, who came out in person with the last canoe-load of coal to receive payment for lighterage, verified the dire announcement and sourly refused to discuss any such thing as illicit trading.

"Then get out!" shouted Joab, and fell to pacing the bridge deep in his complicated problem. It occupied him an hour; then he called the mate.

"The coal we've got here won't last long, Dan. We'll get out right away and go up to Bongan and take in full bunkers and as much more as they'll sell us. This territory's all gone bung under the company. The Brunei people ain't so finicky. Even the Sultan is open to a bit o' palm-greasin', Dan. It ain't so sure that he don't have his hand in them bits o' pirating you hears of at times. Anyway, there's our next stop. It'll give me time to think out some plan o' gettin' to wind'ard o' that big swab Trumbull."

"Always tryin' to get to wind'ard o' people who don't want nothing better than to run traverses along with ye!" grumbled Dan. "You could have gone shares with Ben in this. He asked ye to——"

"Oh, —— yer sool, Dan Treweeks! Shet up!" bellowed Joab, dancing with rage. "Get for'ard and pick up the anchor 'fore I have ye disrated for impudence!"

The next time the steamers came in sight of each other was when Captain Joab, having coaled very fully at Bongan, cruised the coast and at last opened out Labuan Island at the mouth of Brunei Bay.

In common with nearly all men who fancy a grievance Joab grew more bitter the more he brooded on his fancied wrongs, and though Dan Treweeks was entirely right in asserting that opposition existed only in Captain Joab's imagination, the skipper had got into the way of regarding every other trader as his enemy, and now he was bent upon getting to windward of Ben Trumbull in the same spirit as he had tried to get to windward of poor old Sally.

"We won't bother with Labuan, Dan," he said to the mate as they steamed into the vast bay and the *Gannet's* smoke floated like a black feather abeam. "There's a blessed mission'ry visits there for a week, every month, which ain't no use to us. Trumbull's goin' up to Brunei, according to the course he's takin', and seems to me we can comb out this yer bay to a fare-ye-well before he gits back."

"Ain't you done enough now, with y' short o' coal games?" snapped Dan, making no attempt now to hide his disgust with the skipper's warped ideas. "I tell y' what; I want to be paid off!"

"Paid off? Why— What'n —— d'ye mean, Dan Treweeks? You turned against me too? By gorry, mister! Where'll I land y', eh? Say th' word, and ashore y' go right slick!"

"I want to be paid off in a regular port, sir! None o' y' shoving me off on the beach in the jungle, sir. I tell y' what, I'm good and tired o' yer mad notions. There ain't a soul against y' that I know of in the whole eastern seas, 'cept yerself, an' y'll ruin yerself yet. Why ain't we been home in a year

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and more? I got a wife back there as well as you, and I don't aim to turn bulls loose nigh her, either!"

A cunning grin passed over Joab's red face, and his little eyes twinkled.

"Let bygones be, Dan," he said softly. "I can't put in at Brunei now, or I'd do what you want. Just let's finish this trip, Dan; then I'll either pay y' off or we'll make a run home, whichever y' like.

"Maybe I have got foolish notions. I ain't so sure, Dan. But I'm surely goin' to mop up this bay as I figured on when we left Java, and Ben Trumbull and his concessions don't cut a figure at all. Just stick by me for a couple o' weeks, Dan, and we'll feel better."

"Yes, on hardtack and warm water with wigglers in it, in some red-hot mud jail! There's law here, ain't there? And I heard at times of a thing called a cable, or telegraft."

Joab chuckled, his fat sides shaking with swiftly returning good humor.

"There's a cable from Labuan to Sandakan, and up to Hong-kong and down to Singapore," he returned. "But not to Brunei, Dan, not to Brunei, where the *Gannet's* gone. And as for law—God bless y' innocent soul, Mr. Treweeks—ain't the kind o' law that lets pirates scuttle an' burn ships right here on the coast just the sort o' law we want?"

"Maybe, maybe," muttered the mate uneasily. "All the same, Cap'n Fisher, what you're figgering on doing ain't much better'n pirating, and I didn't sign on for it. Besides, seems to me there's a difference, perhaps, between his own country pirates and butters-in, if it comes to a show-down with the Sultan. You'd ought to have joined up with Captain Trumbull when he asked y' to, Joab. Some day you'll see your mistake, I hope, and I hope it's before all your fat's frizzled away on the stone floor of a Brunei jail!"

"*S-shl*" warned Joab, still in high good humor, poking a fat finger into Dan's well-fleshed ribs. "It ain't my fat or yours either as'll frizzle, old boy. It'll be that big swab of a Trumbull as'll lose some blubber. Didn't you see how all-fired quick he wanted to cut us loose when he was towin' us? Did that look jonnick? Tut, Dan, I don't make mistakes that way. Trust me, Dan—I don't make mistakes that way."

DAN never mentioned the subject again while the *Joppa* plied the round of the innermost coast of the bay. Here, at tiny villages built on piles, each squalid hut with its canoe tied to the entry-ladder, each settlement rejoicing in the rule of a headman, more squalid than the houses, but who stoutly defended his rights in the squealing, tottering structure miscalled a dock, and all the graft appertaining thereto, the *Joppa* picked up gratifying parcels of cargo.

Not yet had news of Trumbull's concession reached the outlying posts, so rubber and ebony, sandalwood and gutta-percha, camphor and orchids passed down Cap'n Joab's hatches in a steady stream almost like a stream of gold itself.

"We'll just bite him once more, Dan, then up hook and away with us," smiled Joab at supper one evening.

They had just left a pestilent river estuary and the cargo secured barely compensated them for the blood lost to mosquitoes and bloodthirsty green and gold beetles.

"There's only that village on the horn o' the bay now, and that ought to about fill us up."

"Better leave it alone," grumbled Dan. He had assumed the rôle of perpetual objector lately, and the deep, merry twinkle that lived in his eyes had hidden itself utterly. He seemed even to be getting thinner. This time, as at other times, there was sound reason for his objection.

"That's Trumbull's biggest depot, cap'n," he said. "You'll spoil everything bein' too greedy."

"Huh! I ain't greedy, Dan; I'm teachin' Ben a lesson he'll thank me for later on. Just keep yer eyes liftin' for him, that's all."

And by keeping his eyes lifting, Dan spied the *Gannet* one dark night, lightless, too close in-shore, with a suspicious list to seaward that sent him hurrying down to call the captain after bringing the *Joppa* to a standstill.

"Looks deserted?" yawned Joab, clapping on his cap and mounting to the bridge. "Well, well; so she does, Dan. Shouldn't wonder now if there's a trifle o' salvage——"

"Huh, you wouldn't take salvage from Ben Trumbull? The man who gave ye a tow, free? 'Tain't sailorly, Joab."

"How's tide?" asked Joab absently, peering hard through the black darkness as if

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something, unseen to others, had come within his vision. He ignored Dan's reproof entirely.

"Comin' full now," was the reply, given through the chart-room windows.

Dan pored over a tide card and calculated the difference from Brunei, the nearest station listed.

"High water in about twenty minutes, I figure."

Joab turned down the telegraph handle to "Slow Astern," and the steamer backed almost imperceptibly, turning in a wide arc to hard-over helm. When slightly astern of the dark steamer and lying parallel to her, the *Joppa* was stopped for a moment; then Joab rang for slow ahead and motioned to the helmsman to starboard easy.

Dan came outside and stood beside the skipper, staring ahead with a queer feeling of impending trouble in his breast. There was something so utterly creepy in that scene of blackness, the big steamer lying there seemingly helpless, the silence, the brooding shore and the sibilant sea.

So too was there something ghostly in the forbidding loom of the jungle beyond the dark steamer, from which came no sound, in the whole expanse of which appeared no glimmer of light, yet where, as every one knew, lay a village with large go-downs, populous and self-assertive generally.

"What d'ye puppose doin'?" muttered Dan, irked at last by the skipper's long silence.

Joab was sniffing the air like a hunting-dog at fault.

"Goin' to wait for daylight? Don't look to be much chance o' doin't business, anyway, whatever's happened to Ben Trumbull. Better pull out, I sh'd say, Joab, and call it a v'yage."

Joab sniffed again, harder, and held up a pudgy forefinger.

"Can't you get that snift, Dan? Snift hard, lad. Bites like ——"

"Fire, by Jason!" grunted Dan; and out of the darkness of the foredeck came the soft chorus of the crew—

"Steamer, she on fire, sar!"

"On fire and deserted, Dan!" exclaimed Joab, suddenly smitten with dour gravity of expression.

All the foxy cunning had gone out of his fat red face; the round, wide eyes which were made to twinkle did not exactly perform that evolution even now, but at least they did not peer through screwed lids like a raw-necked vulture's.

They glared ahead at the steamer with something more like righteous anger in them, and when Dan Treweeks caught a glimpse of the skipper's face in the flickering light of a deck-lantern passing forward, he suddenly stood by, tense with eagerness to act, ready for any word that should come, and more than confident that at last he would be able to obey Joab Fisher's orders without risky criticism or disgruntled objections.

"Break out the rifles, Dan," said Joab softly as the *Joppa* slowly drew up to the *Gannet's* quarter. "Call the other watch, deck-hands and firemen both, and issue ammunition. Can't understand this yer business at all, Dan. Seems like there ought to be somebody aboard that steamer; either crew or——"

Suddenly the telegraph clanged with the indicator at "Full Astern," then as suddenly rang to stop, and the two steamers came together with a sullen jar which did little damage to either. Coming up to seaward of the *Gannet*, which he believed to be hard aground, Joab judged shrewdly that there must be lots of water for him, since he drew three feet less than Trumbull and the tide was about full now.

"Get a line fast to her, Dan," was his first order, and he squinted along a rifle while a seaman leaped aboard the *Gannet* to pass the line. Still there was no sign or sound of any one on the stranded ship. Only the seaman, dragging his bow-line down to the well-deck of the *Gannet*, suddenly howled with pain, flung his rope over a pair of bollards in terrific haste, and leaped to the rail, where he ran along like a monkey until he could jump back to his own ship again.

"Dem iron deck —— hot, sar!" he howled up at the skipper, who now knew the mystery.

"Huh! Fired her with hatches on!" he grumbled. "Bet she's like a smelter inside, just waitin' for somebody to open up the draft. It's a bad mess, Dan."

"Yes, but what about poor old Ben and his crew?" mourned honest Dan.

"That's what we're goin' to find out!" snapped Joab with unexpected heat. "Think I'm goin' to stand by and see a ship's company o' white fellows mopped up by a lot

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o' dirty brown pirates? Huh? Can't y' say nothin' Dan? Be I the man to let Ben Trumbull be robbed and nigh murdered while we stand by lookin' on?"

Dan could have said a lot in answer to that. Instead he fell back upon a chuckling alert silence and rubbed his red hands expectantly. The obvious thing to do, if the steamer was to be saved, was to haul her off now the tide was full, scuttle and sink her in water a little deeper, and let the sea put out the fire while search was made for the missing crew. But scuttling her seemed to offer a problem not easily solved. Only by way of engine-room or fire-room could it be done, and even then only in case those usually warm regions were less torrid than the holds.

"Get over, Dan, and shift the line to her after-bitts," said Joab after deep thought. "I'll send another wire over to ye, and while I'm givin' her a pluck to try to move her, you take some hands below and try to open up the sea-valves. Move slippery, now. I don't like to see it so darn quiet round here."

THE quiet was in truth disquieting, queer as it may seem. The simple fact of the steamer's being left stranded so close to a village and deserted while yet her hatches remained intact was either an absolute proof of the innocence of wrongdoing on the part of the shore folks, or strong proof that they were keeping out of evidence with a purpose. This latter supposition was very much to Joab's mind.

He posted the second mate aft, tending the towing-gear, with warning to give his attention to looking out as much as possible to watching ropes. The chief engineer with all his staff, except two men in the stoke-hole, and one in the engine-room to 'tend to signals, came up on deck and exchanged slices and oil-cans for rifles and hand-spikes for the time being.

"Never can tell around these waters," stated Joab solemnly. "Can't see no pirates yet, but I can smell 'em, by gorry! And there ain't no blurry pirate goin' to bite me by surprize."

"All fast!" called Dan from the *Gannet's* stern.

"Stand clear o' the line!" Joab bawled back, and started his ship in motion. The *Joppa* swung in a half-circle as the lines came taut, then took up a straight strain and began to churn up the dark waters noisily while the stranded *Gannet* lazily rolled her list over to the other side under the readjusted tension, proving at least that she was lightly held on the shoal, whatever else her plight might prove.

Dan and his men saw the lines straightened, watched for a moment lest they part or slip under the strain, then disappeared down the stoke-hole ladder on their other errand. Soon the dim glimmer of a lantern danced up through the *Gannet's* fiddley bars, and almost at the same instant a tremendous jarring tug told of the tow moving and the *Joppa* plunging ahead on the suddenly slack line until brought up with a jerk again.

"Is she movin'?" roared Dan's voice from the fiddley grating. There was a note of excitement in the shout.

"Sure! she's off!" bawled back Joab.

"Stand by for us, then. We've opened her up!" came the hail a moment later, and Dan and his men could be seen in the faint light of their lantern waiting for release. "Hurry up!" pleaded Dan anxiously. "She's full o' dead men, cap'n!"

"Full o' what?" bellowed Joab. Before Dan could repeat his grim announcement the second mate aft yelled at the top of his lungs:

"Stand by, sir! Here comes 'bout a million canoes!" and his rifle squibbed off, followed by the wild, scattering fire of his agitated men.

"Come up here, quick!" ordered Joab, at once cool and shrewd.

He brought his steamer to a stop, running her down to the *Gannet* on the last of her impulse, the tow-lines still fast to both ships, the *Gannet* slowly sinking alongside.

"Jump, Dan! Get a move on!"

Then, he never could tell afterward how, before Dan and his men could make the jump, the two vessels swarmed with dark, agile, ferocious Dyaks, every demon of them cutting and stabbing with silent fury. For a moment Dan was hurled back; two of his men pitched down the stoke-hole ladder to stay there until hoisted for burial long afterward. On the *Joppa* the second mate was cut off from the bridge and stood at bay at the ladder, fighting stubbornly. Bridge and bridge-deck alike seemed full of slashing shapes, and Joab grimly spat on his pudgy red hands as he accepted the challenge.

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"Foller me, chief!" he yelled, and hurled his well-nurtured but muscular body fair at the enemy, a huge navy revolver gripped tight in each fat fist. He puffed painfully when a keen blade sliced through three inches of belly-fat; but he swore as heartily as ever, repaid the cut with a deadly bullet of lead and landed beside the second mate like a fleshly tornado.

"This way!" he screamed, whistling shrilly with fury as he leveled yet another knife-handy savage whose blade had streaked his plump cheek. "Can't do nothin' here, lads! Over to the *Gannet* wi' ye! —— their sools! Why'n —— don't y' sail into 'em, Dan?"

"Dan's down," grunted the chief in explanation.

After the first grinning Dyak leaped on board it seemed but a matter of seconds before both ships were swarming with them, and it could not have been more than five minutes before the situation assumed the gravest of aspects. Half a dozen men, Lascars, including the three men on duty in the *Joppa's* fire and engine rooms, fell in attempting to join their mates.

On board the *Joppa* no defenders were left and the pirates, secure in the protection of their overwhelming numbers, lost no time in starting a search for loot. On the sizzling decks of the *Gannet*, amid clouds of steam rising from cooling plates as she settled into the harbor silt, Joab and his men battled stoutly to join Dan, who had fought his way clear of foes and gained a place of vantage with his back to a bulkhead, where he was once more the center of a snarling pack.

For all the deadly ferocity of the fight, there was a grim silence as to vocal sound. The swishing ripple of water alongside could be heard and the heavy staccato breathing of struggling men. Steam gushed through deck ventilators with a hollow moan, and the cooling plates cracked and twanged as if beaten with bars. Far away, shoreward, it seemed, a yell went up. None of the pirates heard it, or if hearing it they paid it no heed. Joab heard it, and grimly sought a chance to recharge his revolver. He heard it again, and now it was chorused with others which seemed suddenly to be cut off. It meant nothing to him except the possibility of more foes.

"Here, give 's room!" he howled, and rushed among his attackers fighting with fist and clubbed pistol like a fury. Dan and the second mate, the two engineers and the donkeyman, all the white men of the crew of the *Joppa*, backed up the skipper with a mighty onslaught, and the resulting clearance gave the wavering Lascars and Sidiboys room to use their rifles as firearms again.

FOR perhaps thirty seconds the pirates were driven back; then they came again, diving under the shaking rifle-barrels to bob up with murderous cut and stab right before the wide eyes of the half-panicky seamen. Grimly the white men fought, saving speech to give more power to blows, firing only when sure of bringing down a man. And all the while the lights in the *Joppa's* chart-room flickered upon the shapes of hurrying Dyaks, darting in and out of the saloon companion-way, and the sound of crashing blows on woodwork thudded at Joab Fisher's heart. It was his cherished old steamer they were demolishing before his eyes.

"Can't we make a rush across and stand 'em off from there just as well?" panted Dan Treweeks hoarsely.

His red round face was streaked with blackened blood, and his shirt was wet with more than sweat; but there was fire in his eyes and stout resolution in his soul, because he fought at the side of the Joab Fisher he had known in the years long gone by. For that man he was prepared to go to the uttermost limit.

"We'll do that," grunted Joab in reply, "when we've cleaned 'em out o' old Ben's ship. Here, stop that!"

He fired swiftly at a group of Dyaks who had separated from the rest and were setting torches to the bridge woodwork. There seemed to be fire kept burning in some of the canoes alongside. A yell pealed out as the fire took hold, and the pirates seemed to content themselves with keeping their foes within a circle.

The attack certainly slackened, and stiffened up again only when trial was made to break through either to get at the fire or the rails. Dan suddenly sat down on the fiddley, as if his vitality had run out of his legs. He kept busy with his pistol but only grunted shortly at Joab's urging to rise. The chief engineer and the donkeyman leaned heavily against the cold smoke-stack, gasping, and Joab himself felt as if he were standing knee-deep in warm fluid.

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Out in the darkness that strange yell pealed out again, and it seemed no different to Joab's dull hearing.

"Come on, an' be —— to ye!" he barked in challenge.

Perhaps there was something noteworthy in that yell, though, for the pirates suddenly broke into shrill response, and the attack was renewed fiercely. At a piercing command from the leader the Dyaks came tumbling out from the *Joppa* and clustered about the rails, peering shoreward excitedly.

"Better get aboard the *Joppa*, cap'n, and pull out," yelled the engineer. "She'll be aground pretty soon."

"S'pose we better," groaned Joab heavily. He glared around at the circling foes, waiting there for him to break. At his feet he could hear the wheezy breathing of Dan, old Dan Treweeks, mate of a score of years; and he had done what he could for Trumbull's ship—aye, as much as any man could do.

"Come on then," he decided. "Stand up, Dan, and we'll make a bust through."

"Bust through yerself, cap'n; I'm done," Dan retorted doggedly.

"Done? Ain't quittin'——"

"Quittin' be blowed! I can't stand up. Get aboard, you, an' give my love to Liza back home, Joab. Get goin', now, 'fore——"

"Huh! Shet up, —— yer sool, Dan Treweeks!" screamed Joab, and the Dyaks fell back in momentary fright at his ferocious attack. Then the circle narrowed again, and the pistols were silent for lack of ammunition. Clubbed revolvers and rifles opposed knife and stabbing spear with stubborn courage; but the circle ever narrowed now, and pirates bolder than their fellows crept across the fiddley from the other side, hoping to gain the rear of those battling white men before they were seen.

Slowly Joab felt his knees sagging. He knew vaguely that the second mate had pitched out of sight somewhere, that the chief engineer and donkeyman, the second engineer and old Dan Treweeks were still with him but not pulling their weight; and vaguely he felt something like hot iron licking twice or thrice at his ribs and back, while his legs grew ever weaker and the dark faces around him drew in closer.

There was a hazy, uncertain whirling of shapes around him, and a pealed shriek which almost wakened him from the swoon he was falling into. Then he flung out his hands, the pudgy red hands that had fought so well, and slumped to the deck like a falling corn sack.

"Domyersool, Trumbull!" he sobbed, "I never got no good out o' you yet!"

BUT there's good in everything for somebody. Out of the scrubby little tug-boat, whose shrieking whistle had been the last earthly sound to assail the conscious hearing of Joab Fisher, a raging crowd of angry white men piled at the heels of the big Ben Trumbull, and in five minutes the only Dyaks left alive were swimming.

It was three days later when Trumbull, having brought the *Joppa* up to Brunei with his own steamer in tow, found time to visit the little missionary hospital to which Joab and his carved-up comrades had been sent in the tug-boat.

"Doggawn you, Joab," he bellowed in defiance of all the regulations of the hospital, "you doggawn old swab, I knowed you'd turn up trumps! If you hadn't happened along and done the neighborly in haulin' my old steamer off and sinking her, them Dyaks would just about have spoiled her for me, wouldn't they?

"Put her aground, I did, like a blessed green griffin, Joab. And hiked off for a tug, right up here to Brunei, and had to bring away all the white hands except the engineers to row the blessed boat—never would have made my Lascars pull twenty mile, Joab.

"And after all there'd ha' been nothing left if you hadn't hauled her off like a blessed Trojan, and then turned to and killed half them pirates as had killed my poor engineers and every native hand aboard. Lucky I only had a cargo o' meal for the different stations. That's done for, o' course. How about you, Joab? You got a cargo?"

Joab was almost dazed, yet. Though he had fought like a proper man in the crisis, defending another man's property, he had not forgotten that it was no such altruistic motive that had guided him to the scene in the first place.

"Sure I got a cargo," he returned slowly, trying to catch the eye of Dan Treweeks in the next cot. "I thought o' takin' a voyage home, Ben. Dan and me both need six months' spell after this little picnic. But as for th' cargo——"

Again he strove to catch Dan's eye and

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failed. It was Ben's hearty bellow that broke in:

"Listen, Joab. I asked you many a time to join up with me. Seems a mighty good time now. It'll take more than a month to put the *Gannet* in shape, and it won't be tomorrow that you'll be fit to sail a ship; neither you nor any of your crowd, Joab. Let me take the *Joppa*. I'll carry you all home, sell your cargo, and come back here and work the ship until my own's ready for sea. Then you can finish your shore-spell when you like, come on out and take the *Joppa* again, and we'll sweep this country clean o' trade between us. What about it?"

A WEEK later, while they lay at comparative ease under the bridge awnings of the *Joppa*, Queensland bound, the eyes of Captain Joab and Dan Treweeks met. There was a twinkle in both pairs of deep-set blue eyes, but Joab forced his voice to a gruffness not in keeping with a twinkle.

"Now, domyersool, what'n —— y' grinnin' like a Chessy cat for, Dan Treweeks? Be you like all the rest, a-laughin' at——"

"I was jest a-thinkin'," Dan grinned back, "that you're havin' a durn sight more luck than that ol' ooman the prince hove into the duck-pond, Joab."

Joab glared, but his eyes only met a broad, red-flanneled back, for Dan had turned away, chuckling:

"Even pirates bring th' old swab luck, by Jason! An' yet he says every man's hand's ag'in' him! Glory!"

But Joab was almost cured. It needed only the one small finishing touch to put him completely right; and that came when he met dear old Sally, with her comely old face alight as of old, but with an unaccustomed gleam of shrewd enjoyment in her spectacled eyes. He glared around at first, ready to loose his vocal batteries upon brother Thomas; but even that act of war was unnecessary. From the dock where she met him, Sally had him driven in a smart little automobile past their old home, which looked entirely flourishing.

"Rented to good tenants, Joab," was the explanation.

Out along a peaceful country road, always in sight of his beloved sea, the auto took him until a pretty little farm was reached, planted with fruit and shade trees, with green pastures dotted with sheep and poultry, and a snug bungalow that looked too pretty to live in.

"I thought you'd like it, Joab," said Sally, watching him keenly. "You see, I put up a flagstaff and all. I've done it all myself, and all for us, Joab, you and me."

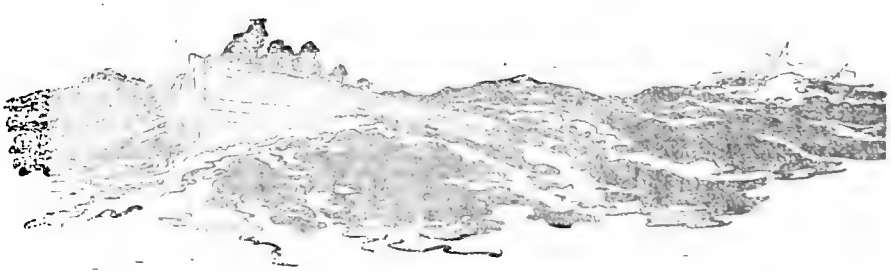
She kissed him with warmth and with due regard for his hurts.

"You done pretty well in the time, Sally," he said, wondering where the money had come from. He rather expected to find brother Thomas living in a mansion with Sally perhaps allowed the use of a couple of rooms. Sally met his inquiring glance, and her thin cheeks turned pink.

"Well, you paid quite a lot of bills, you know, Joab," she replied.

Dan Treweeks was quite old when he finally quit the sea, but he never heard Captain Joab Fisher utter one word again about men's hands being against him.

Joab was cured, for all his disbelief in the doctor.



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The PLAINS of PLAGUE

By Samuel Alexander White

Author of "The Long Traverse," "The Void Spaces," etc.

"WHAT'S yon droning I hear—a *voyageur* song?" demanded old Roderick Clunis, raising his head from his factor's desk in new Norway House. "Like as not it's the mail-packet from Fort Garry. It's due some time today and it should be here on schedule for there has been a miracle of calm on Lake Winnipeg for the past week or more. Aye, it will be the packet, no doubt. Molson, are you not hearing yon drone?"

Wallace Molson, chief trader to Clunis in the Hudson's Bay Company post, raised his head from the day-book on which he was at work with the post accounts and listened intently. His was a handsome face in repose, massive, strong, straight-lined, bronzed by the wilderness winds and illumined by wide-spaced eyes of deepest lake-blue. Over his high forehead, upon which thirty years of hardship and danger had left but faint creases, his fair hair fell in crisp waves and as he listened he combed it unconsciously with his muscled hand so that it shot forth ever changing lights, copper, golden, dun.

"Yes, it's singing," he nodded, "but more like the Indian chant than the *voyageur* tune. I'm not sure whether it is the packet."

"Look and see," Clunis requested.

Molson closed his day-book and came out from behind his counter in the trading-room where they sat.

"It doesn't sound like our boatmen," he doubted again as he strode across the floor. "Still it might be. We'll soon see."

But as he pulled open the trading-room door and looked out upon the river that wound from Lake Winnipeg by new Norway House his eyes confirmed his doubts. It was not the Fort Garry mail-packet afloat but a craft of another kind. Red as blood under the flush of the crimson dawn lay the stream and in the middle distance he glimpsed a long canoe, ebony-black in the ruddy glow, slipping on from Lake Winnipeg.

"Is it the packet, then?" demanded Clunis impatiently as he rose in afterthought and joined him outside.

"No, not a York boat at all but a canoe," Molson pointed out.

Old Roderick peered from under his heavy brows, his gnarled hand shading his pale opal eyes from the flaming glare of the sunrise.

"Aye, so 'tis," he admitted. "But from where, Wallace? Can you make it out? The dazzle is too much for my old eyes."

Clunis turned away his eyes, running water like a woman's, sending twin rivulets down his crinkled cherry-red nose, and blew a trumpet-blast into his handkerchief.

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"You are young yet, Wallace," he sighed. "You can stand sun-glare and divers things. Where is it from?"

"From across Lake Winnipeg—the Saskatchewan country, I take it," deduced Molson. "There are five people in it. The four paddlers are Saulteaux Indians and the white man with them— Yes, by Jove, I'm certain of him now. It's the French trader Maurice Dolbeau from the Fort à la Mauve district."

Clunis stared fixedly at his chief trader as the latter identified the wilderness traveler, for Maurice Dolbeau had made much trouble for him throughout the inland districts of the Hudson's Bay Company. One of the outstanding figures of the fur-trade before Confederation Year, 1867, he had not continued his lot with the Hudson's Bay Company when it turned over the West to the Government of Canada in 1869, but now for a year or more had chosen, rather, the rôle of free-trader.

To be a free trader by virtue of a new rule in the West was well enough but the trouble was that Dolbeau interpreted the license of a free trader as that of a poacher, and more than once the Hudson's Bay Company had tried to drive him out of the Saskatchewan country where he intruded on their preserves. But he was too great a power among the pagan Indians of the district.

He remained there a menace to the company's interests and to the personal interests of Roderick Clunis as well, for Estelle the factor's daughter, girlish queen of Norway House, had not escaped Dolbeau's covetous eye.

Whenever Estelle went up to Fort à la Mauve to visit her friends Mrs. Saunders, wife of the missionary stationed there, Maurice was always smirking somewhere about the Fort, and now when he glimpsed the French trader through eyes still bleared, the thoughts of old Roderick Clunis flew to Estelle, absent from Norway House on one of these periodic visits.

"Why has Dolbeau crossed Lake Winnipeg?" he propounded to Molson. "Why is he not smirking about Fort à la Mauve as usual? And what brings him here with a single canoe?"

"Heaven knows," answered Molson, "although I doubt if he is coming to Norway House. It would be very strange if a man with whom we are so greatly at odds should come from Fort à la Mauve just to pay us a spiteful visit. Also, there's Estelle up there, as you say. I'm afraid there's something else afoot with him, Roderick. You'll see, he'll not turn his canoe bow in here."

"If he doesn't we'll be having a word with him all the same," Clunis growled. "The man must be soaked with impudence to parade under our noses to carry out his schemes. But wait—Could it be that he carries a message from my girl?"

"We'll know in a moment," breathed the chief trader, his blue eyes narrowing jealously.

Still the craft slipped on without swerving from the straight course with the evident intention of passing by Norway House when Molson signaled with his hand and bellowed across the water.

"Lay to a minute, Dolbeau," he requested. "It's not good business to let you pass the Hudson's Bay Company's headquarters unchallenged. Just give us a little account of yourself. What are you doing here on this side of Lake Winnipeg and whereabouts are you bound?"

DOLBEAU, his craft exactly opposite the Norway House landing, turned his face shoreward at the hail, a thin sallow face with jaw and cheek bones showing with a grisly distinctness through a skin wherein smallpox in his youth had left its scarring pits. His little black mustache twisted upward as his pale lips writhed in a mocking grin and his big brown eyes sprayed fire as he suddenly stood erect in his canoe. He spoke a word to his Saulteaux Indians and the paddlers abruptly paused, their blades backwatering with a foaming swirl.

"*Comment?*" he demanded of the chief trader. "Does the Hudson's Bay Company still own the waterways that I must tell my business to its agents when I travel?"

"You'd better tell it or maybe you won't go on very far," advised Molson significantly.

"Very well, then, Molson, since there is nothing to hide," the free trader grinned. "I go to Rossville Mission just beyond your headquarters."

"And your business there, man?" cut in old Roderick Clunis. "I thought perhaps you had a message for me; a message from Estelle."

"No, Estelle is well and beautiful as

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ever," smirked Maurice, "but I have no message from her. Only a message from the Fort à la Mauve Mission to the Rossville Mission."

"It's strange that Saunders sends a message by you, a leader of pagan Indians," Molson quickly pointed out. "How was it that he didn't send one of his Christian Indians?"

"Ha! Ha!" laughed Dolbeau. "Because I was the only one who was immune. *Oui*, and my Saulteaux crew was the only crew that was immune."

"Immune?" echoed Molson, a great fear suddenly gripping him. "There's something wrong on the Saskatchewan?"

"Wrong?" chuckled Dolbeau, wheeling swiftly to stare backward at some sound on the river in his wake. "There is very much wrong, although that is a mild term for it. But if you and Monsieur Clunis would know all about it why not ask your own company men instead of delaying me? Yonder they are, fresh from Fort Garry, and you may be sure they know the worst."

Maurice Dolbeau pointed where, from his position of advantage on the water surface, he first had caught the sound of oars and Molson and the factor turned to glimpse the Fort Garry mail-packet they were expecting plowing through the river. In a fully manned York boat it came. Sail was down on the long-prowed craft but the mast still stood upright with the Hudson's Bay Company flag flying from its tip and eight tanned rowers besides the steersman on the sweeps. As they swung in sight of Norway House a cheer broke from them and the long sweeps were poised abruptly in air as a salute to Clunis and Molson on the landing.

"*Oui, messieurs*, ask them," nodded Dolbeau in mocking farewell as he waved a hand for his Saulteaux paddlers to proceed. "I think you will find their story quite enough."

The free trader's craft was gliding on as he spoke and, having now no justifiable reason for stopping it, Molson and Clunis moodily watched it go and the plunging York boat plow on in the wake it left. With another cheer and flourish at the end of their journey the boatmen swerved it in to the landing.

"What's the word about the Saskatchewan country, Duchene?" Molson asked the *voyageur* packeteer who stood up amidships, the mail-packet in his hands.

"De word is smallpox," announced Duchene with a grave face. "Wan plague on de country."

"You say so, man?" blurted old Roderick. "And my girl's up yonder at Fort à la Mauve. Where did it start?"

"She's start 'way down on de Missouri in de first an' she's travel lak wan prairie-fire north to de Saskatchewan, from de Gros Ventre Indians to de Bloods of de Blackfeet people, to de Peigans and *aussi* to de Crees. She's very bad among dose Crees. But you'll be find wan proclamation 'bout her in de packet. Dere it is."

Duchene tossed the mail-bag into the hands of Molson and jumped out on the landing to direct his crew in the unloading of the cargo the big craft had brought along with the mail.

"Then we'd better see the inside of yon packet at once, Wallace," rumbled old Roderick as the two hurried back into the post.

"Yes," agreed Molson grimly. "Plague isn't a thing you can dally with."

He threw the mail-bag on the counter in the trading-room, and old Roderick swiftly opened it, spilling its contents all along the board. As swiftly Molson rummaged through it, seeking the proclamation of which Duchene had spoken.

"Here it is," he announced suddenly. "And we have to remember that Manitoba's a province now and that governmental authority is supreme, Roderick. Just look at that."

Quickly the factor cast his eyes over the printed decree.

"By St. George!" he exclaimed. "The Government of Manitoba forbids any one going on trail, eh? It shuts off all intercourse with the infected Saskatchewan district till further notice."

"Yes, and they may be in need on the North Saskatchewan by this time," brooded Molson, "particularly at Fort à la Mauve, which depends almost entirely on supplies from Fort Garry. But there'll certainly be further word about that in the post orders. There's the bundle."

He handed the factor a tied packet of letters and documents that had to do with post routine and the factor ferreted through them with feverish haste till he found what he sought.

"Man, man, listen to this."

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Old Roderick slapped the dispatches of lesser importance back on the counter and read aloud the one in his hand:

"This packet carries to you a copy of the Government proclamation which tells you that the Fort Garry end of our transportation line is closed. We can not provision Fort à la Mauve by Red River carts this year. It must be done by York boats from Norway House. You will appoint a man to command those boats and provide Indian crews to man them.

"According to the latest news from the Saskatchewan which came in before communication was cut off, the disease had not reached the fort, although the men must pass through infected districts to reach it. When the fort is reached the brigade-leader you appoint will hold council with Cameron, the Fort à la Mauve factor, deciding whether to close the post and fall back on Norway House or not."

"It is just what I feared," nodded Clunis. "Smallpox runs like fire, and you are the only man I'd trust, Wallace, to get Estelle away from Fort à la Mauve before the plague strikes it. Aye, and the only man I'd trust to see that all at the post are provisioned. Game is plentiful enough, but they will be out of ammunition by this time. And if sickness should come there are no medicines at hand. You are appointed this minute and you must start at once."

"Yes, at once," accepted Molson thoughtfully, his mind on Estelle. "You look after the boats and provisions, Roderick, while I go over to Rossville Mission and get the Indian crews."

"All right, man, I'll have them ready for you by the time you get back," the old factor assured him. "Maurice Dolbeau must have brought down the same word as our packet. Saunders of the Fort à la Mauve Mission has sent a call for help to Fielding of the Rossville Mission."

"Very likely," agreed the chief trader, "although it's very strange Estelle sent no letter by Dolbeau if she knew he was coming."

"Aye, it is that," declared Clunis. "Question Maurice closely at the Mission. At any rate he'll have later news of the post than we got from the packet."

"Dolbeau has little love for me," Molson reminded the factor. "He will tell me nothing I want to know."

"Still he may be some help to you in his dark ways, man."

"More likely a hindrance than a help," observed Molson bitterly as he stalked off down to the landing.

HE LEAPED into his own canoe and paddled away toward the mission. The vigorous drive of his paddle soon covered the two and one-half miles separating the mission from Norway House, and as he drew in to the landing he could see the missionary Fielding and Maurice Dolbeau coming down to the water's edge where waited Dolbeau's canoe with the four Saulteaux paddlers still in their places.

"Ah!" breathed Fielding, looking up as he heard the stamp of Molson's moccasins on the landing. "Here is Molson himself. Now I shall know at once whether I can get boats and provisions and shall be able to send the word back with you."

Fielding hurried forward, extending an eager hand to the chief trader.

"You come opportunely, Molson," he greeted earnestly. "We are in need of your assistance in a vital matter."

"Is that so?" returned Molson, his eyes reading the missionary's esthetic face and passing on to Dolbeau's grisly, sallow one. "Then I guess it's a case of mutual need, Fielding. We have word by the packet from Fort Garry of the advance of the smallpox plague and it puts our post of Fort à la Mauve in a bad position. A fleet of our York boats is ordered up the Saskatchewan at once and of course you're free to send whatever necessaries or medicines you like up to your other mission."

"Thanks, Molson, thanks," accepted Fielding. "When does it start?"

"Just as soon as we can load. I'm in command and I've come across for the Indian crews. The crews will run a great risk. I will force no man to go against his will. I wish you would explain the situation to them, Fielding, and ask for volunteers."

"All right," agreed the missionary. "I'll have them gather in the Mission House and I'll call for volunteers."

"I'll need enough to man twenty boats," Molson told him as he stepped back into his canoe. "Send them over on my heels. And you, Dolbeau—" turning to address the free-trader who had likewise reembarked—"we depend on you to let Fort à la Mauve know we're coming. You'll travel faster by canoe."

"Have no fear," smirked Dolbeau. "I'll carry the word to the fort."

"What was the situation there when you left?" questioned Molson.

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"I do not know," the free trader replied evenly. "I was not there but hunting with the tribes when the word came to me from Monsieur Saunders. You see, none of the other Indians would take the risk of carrying a message through infected territory. As for me there was no risk, and I had Saulteaux men with me who had seen plague before. *Oui*, and when Mademoiselle Estelle sent her entreaty in addition, how could a man refuse?"

Dolbeau laughed slyly at his thrust as he waved his paddlers to speed his craft away. Molson scowled with doubt as he followed in the free trader's wake. Did Maurice lie or only evade? He could not know till he reached Fort à la Mauve.

The four Saulteaux paddlers soon distanced him. As he paddled away he could see Fielding gathering the Indians into the mission. He caught the sound of chanted hymns and knew that they were partaking of a religious feast before they started. Nor were they long after him. As he landed back at Norway House he could hear the Indian crews in the distance timing their paddle-strokes to a hymn in Cree, while far ahead, speeding toward Lake Winnipeg, sounded the pagan chant of Dolbeau's Saulteaux.

"Word of the start has gone ahead with Dolbeau," he told the factor, moiling over the York boats. "Is everything ready?"

"Aye, everything fit to sail," declared old Roderick, pointing to the line of boats he had caused to be loaded with food, ammunition and divers necessaries in a time of sickness. "What is the news at the mission?"

"Just what we thought, a call for help from Saunders. But I could learn nothing else from that rascal Dolbeau. Here come our volunteers now."

Up drove the mission canoes filled with the Indian crews. They tossed aboard the York boats the packs Fielding had sent across and tumbled into their places themselves.

"All aboard!" called Molson cheerily. "Well, good-by, Roderick, and don't worry yourself while we're gone. We'll come through safely, beat the plague into Fort à la Mauve and bring out Estelle."

"Pray God you will, Wallace," breathed the old factor fervently as he gripped the chief trader's hand over the York boat's gunwale. "Watch yon Maurice Dolbeau. Let him work no harm toward my girl."

IN THE foremost York boat Molson hoisted the Hudson's Bay Company's flag and, with a final wave of his hand to Clunis on the landing, led out of the river for Lake Winnipeg. For the river-work he had to depend on the sweeps alone, but when he emerged on the lake itself he hoisted sail and ran before a light wind.

Looking back, he thrilled to the sight he glimpsed from the van of the fleet, a score of boats manned by one hundred and sixty tawny boatmen winging along the north shore of Lake Winnipeg for the mouth of the Saskatchewan River. Here on this vast inland sea there was no danger but the elemental danger of reef and storm.

He could cast his night camps at will upon the shore and his eager young hunters took toll of the game in the bordering forest. But once they drifted off Lake Winnipeg and entered the flow of the mighty Saskatchewan River the routine changed abruptly and Molson issued strict orders to his men.

"No one must set foot ashore by day or by night," he warned them, "till we reach Fort à la Mauve. There are plenty of supplies aboard. So we do not need to touch the banks. At night the boats will be anchored in mid-stream."

Of Maurice Dolbeau the chief trader had seen nothing since leaving Norway House. He was boring on ahead with his swift Saulteaux paddlers. While occasional head winds held them, while mishaps to the boats delayed them, Maurice had gained till he was now far in the lead with word of their coming. He was immune from the plague. He could travel with less caution. While for Molson's fleet grim Death, the fearful Red Death, lurked upon both riverbanks.

For weeks he shunned the shores. Through a plague-stricken country they wound around the Saskatchewan's sinuous coils, sail down once more and pulling with sweeps against the current, forging onward laboriously toward Fort à la Mauve. On either hand deserted tepee villages flashed into view, ragged temples of the dead, breeding-places of the plague, festering under the blazing Summer sun.

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Hotter and hotter it grew, each sun-glazed, heat-hazed week more like a molten furnace than the last, till the Norway House boatmen sweated like slaves over the oars and Molson took to sheltering them in the noon swelter of the day and pressing on in the cooler twilight of the long northern evenings.

Moreover, as he neared Fort à la Mauve Molson had to guard against the menace of the pagan Blackfeet. He was not informed of their movements. They might be near at hand, and he knew Maurice Dolbeau was always ready to incite them to some deviltry. He did not trust the free trader for a moment even though Maurice carried in apparent peace the word of his coming. With his mad infatuation for Estelle Clunis and his bitter hatred of the Hudson's Bay Company, Dolbeau was capable of anything.

So, in the immediate vicinity of the fort, Molson exercised greater and greater caution. The cargoes he freighted were far too precious to risk their loss to pillagers. The lives of the gallant crews he commanded were likewise far too precious to be endangered by contact with plague-stricken people. The roving Blackfeet greatly outnumbered his men, and a sudden attack might wipe out his fleet in sight of its goal. Or even if he won through them they might infect his crews all the same.

The hazard was too great to chance. Ten miles below Fort à la Mauve, on the twenty-ninth day out of Norway House, Molson gave the order to the York-boat crews to anchor in mid-stream.

"We shall wait for the shelter of the dark to go in to the fort," he told them. "You will eat and rest yourselves till then."

At dusk Molson once more ordered the big fleet in motion on the last stretch of its up-river journey, leading off as usual in the first York boat, and in silence except for the slight wash of the hulls and the muffled straining of the oars they inched on to the post.

In the van of the brigade Molson glimpsed it first with a thrill; the company buildings and the mission beyond lying amid the shelter of low bluffs in a crescent bend of the Saskatchewan. The dusk that had befriended them was fading before the moonrise. Over the parklands that stretched away in the direction of the Assiniboine a monstrous disk of opal floated slowly up and poured a flood of changing gleams through the sparsely wooded bluffs. The Saskatchewan's surface glowed silver under the dipping oars. Ashore Fort à la Mauve and the mission beside were silhouetted black as ebony against the luminous sky.

Molson could see no tepees in the vicinity of the post and he drew a breath of relief. Evidently the Blackfeet were nowhere at hand. His York boat grounded softly against the Fort à la Mauve landing, and he stepped ashore for the first time since leaving Lake Winnipeg. And instantly he knew that the watch at the post gate had marked him, fantom-like as his craft had drifted in, for there was a sudden tumult inside and a voice he recognized as that of Laterriere, the Fort à la Mauve chief trader, cried out a challenge.

"*Hola!* Who comes dere?"

"Molson from Norway House, with York-boat cargoes," he answered.

A CHEER burst from those in the post. The halyard of the flagstaff rattled in the calm night and Molson saw the company's flag fly up to greet him, a streak of flame burning blood-red against the moon-pearl. Then the post gate swung back and there was a rush for the landing; Laterriere in the lead.

"T'ank *le bon Dieu* you come, Molson, but ba gar, don't land, don't land," Laterriere cried greeting and warning in the same breath. "Step back into dat boat."

Automatically, so long had he kept his guard while ascending the Saskatchewan, Molson stepped back over the gunwale he had crossed, staring keenly for a glimpse of the girlish figure he hoped to see. But Estelle Clunis was not amid the rush of men, and Molson experienced a sudden dread.

"What do you mean, Laterriere?" he demanded tensely. "Have you smallpox?"

"*Oui*, she's come at last," Laterriere told him. "Cameron de factor, he be dead and Saunders' family be sick wit' it."

"Thunderation! Is Estelle Clunis at the mission?"

"*Non, non*, not Mademoiselle Clunis," explained Laterriere excitedly. "She be safe enough in de trading-post yondaire. She be dressing. Gone to bed, you see, 'cause it be late an' we t'ink de fleet not arrive dis day anyway. Maurice Dolbeau brought de word wan week ago dat you

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be comin' an' we shouted de cheerful news into de mission. Every day dey be look for you. Dey need de medicines an' t'ings. De mission's de isolation hospital now."

Laterriere pointed toward the squat building with its tower and spire all silvered with the moonlight.

Molson nodded understandingly, filled with thankfulness that Estelle had escaped the plague so far and that Laterriere and the rest had the wisdom to transfer her from the mission to the trading-post in time.

"Where's Dolbeau now?" he asked. "I don't see him in the crowd."

"W'ere?" echoed Laterriere. "Why, w'ere he always is, traffickin' wit' dose pagan Blackfeet. Wan day he's on de post an' de next he's holdin' council wit' de tribes. Hand in hand wit' deir conjurors, dat free trader. He be play upon deir superstitions for his own ends, you bet. Maurice be work de double game. He carry wan message to your Rossville Mission at Norway House to please Mademoiselle Clunis an' at de same taim I'm t'ink he conspire wit' dose Indians to get a grip on Fort à la Mauve.

"How I'm t'ink dat? Well, dose tribes suffer ver' much from de plague. Wan tribe be lost fourteen t'ousand people. Every chief of de Blackfeet nation be gone an' dere's only de conjurors an' Maurice Dolbeau to lead de tribes. Ain't you be hear de worst news yet? Dey're desperate under de scourge. Dey blame it on de Christian whites an' dey've banded to wipe out de missions and posts. *Mon Dieu*, an' dat's de solemn truth, for dey were here today."

"They attacked you?" cried Molson.

Laterriere shook his head. "We ain't see de main body 'cause it's lurking in de prairie grass but t'ree Blackfeet went into de mission to spy out our strength. I guess Maurice ain't told dem de smallpox is dere for soon's dey see it dey run lak rabbits. Dey hold wan council an' I'm get wan scout close enough to hear dem. Dey say it ain't de missionary handles de plague or he wouldn't let hees own family fall sick, so dey come to de tradin'-post to spy out again."

"You didn't let them in," Molson burst out.

Laterriere laughed softly in his throat, his swarthy face creased with a hundred wrinkles.

"Oh, I ain't stop dem," he chuckled. "I'm t'ink w'at does for de mission will do for de post an' I'm ready for dem. We ain't got wan smallpox case in de tradin-post, so I soon make wan. I'm take ma brigade-leader Peter Beaudet an' pin-prick hees skin an' rub heem till he's good an' red.

"*Comment?* You should be see dose Blackfeet stare an' run w'en Peter groans in hees blanket. Ho! Ho! Dey hold anodder council. Dey say it ain't de post-keepers eidder dat bear de scourge or dey would keep it off deir men for sure."

In spite of the gravity of the situation Molson's face relaxed into a smile at Laterriere's ruse.

"That was shrewd of you, Laterriere," he commended. "You saved yourself from an attack, no doubt. But it won't be for long if Maurice Dolbeau knows I've arrived, and I guess he has Indian spies enough to know. We must act quickly. My orders were to confer with Cameron and decide whether it would be best to close Fort à la Mauve. Since poor Cameron's gone I have to use my single judgment. I'm using it this minute. It's in the best interests of the Hudson's Bay Company and every one connected with it to close the post when the disease has come so near it. Don't you think so yourself, Laterriere?"

"*Oui*," nodded Laterriere with conviction, "dat's what de odder posts be doin' all t'roo de West. De word comes to us dat de factors be outfittin' an' provisionin' deir men an' scatterin' dem out on deir far trap-lines. If dey keep separate dey can't take de smallpox from any wan else."

"Just so," Molson agreed. "That's the safer plan—far safer than herding them in some other spot. Of course Clunis' daughter goes down to Norway House to her father. You and Peter Beaudet can take your choice of following the hunters or coming with me. Has Saunders help enough at the mission to pull through all right?"

"But yes, he be nearly ovaire de disease heemself an' he be have two men. Dey'll be all right. De Blackfeet won't go wit'in wan mile of dem now dey know de Red Death be dere. Peter and me, why we'll go wit' you. You came up de Saskatchewan wit'out touchin' infection an' we should go back de same way. Me, I'll nevaire rest till I see Mademoiselle Clunis safe

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once more at Norway House. Look—you ain't see her? Dere she is runnin' out of de post now."

MOLSON caught his breath with a thrill as he glimpsed Estelle flitting lightly down from the post. Like a wood nymph in the moonlight she ran, her white Summer dress enveloping her tall, lithe form in gossamer folds. Neck and throat bare to the balmy night air that caressed her as she rushed along and kissed her cheeks to the hue of the wild rose, fair hair streaming loose in a golden cascade, amethyst eyes glowing with excitement at the announcement of the Norway House fleet's arrival, she sped as swiftly as a fawn to the landing and darted through the eager crowd of half-breeds and Christian Indian hunters.

Deferentially they fell aside, opening a lane in their bronzed ranks to give her passage, and Laterriere leaped to meet her with the grace of an old French dancing-master. He caught her finger-tips with a courteous sweep of his body and swung in beside her, seeming to lift her with the strength of his arm as she sprang over the gunwale of Molson's York boat.

"You ain't be land," Laterriere laughed softly, his shrewd eyes watching the color rise in Molson's sun-smoked cheeks, "so Mademoiselle Estelle comes to you. *Mademoiselle*, a friend from home—come a long way to greet you."

"A long way indeed," cried Estelle, all eagerness to hear news of Norway House. "Yes, and a dangerous way. I guessed it would be you my father would send, Wallace. He gave you the little note I enclosed with my letter?"

Impulsively Molson had grasped her hands in greeting, glorying in the wonderful gleam of her eyes, the flash of her smile, the animation of her whole luring being. Estelle alone was worth the journey through hundreds of miles of plague-ridden country where the Red Death raged upon both the Saskatchewan's banks.

"What note, Estelle?" he demanded in surprize. "What letter?"

"Why, the letter I sent down to my father with Maurice Dolbeau when he carried Saunders' message to the Rossville Mission," she told him. "I put in a word for you. Is it possible that my father overlooked the note?"

"I guess Maurice overlooked the letter," asserted Molson grimly. "He didn't touch canoe at Norway House. He didn't deliver any letter to your father."

A hurt expression crept up into the girl's eyes and the amethyst gleam in them darkened with sudden anger.

"Then you got no word of me at all," she burst out. "That Maurice! What a cowardly thing to do. Just wait till he comes in to Fort à la Mauve again."

Molson's eyes shifted aside at an abrupt movement in the crowd about the landing, shifted and narrowed dangerously as he recognized the figure shouldering through the half-breeds and Indian hunters.

"You won't have long to wait, Estelle," he nodded significantly. "Here's Dolbeau now, sneaking in from the Blackfeet camps."

Estelle wheeled quickly to see Dolbeau squeezing his way through the crush to the very edge of the landing. How long he had been in the crowd unnoticed she did not know, but she was aware that he had heard her denunciation of him, for his face was blazing with wrath.

Hasty in temper at the best of times, he was now shaking in a frenzy, and moreover, the swift journey up-river from the Rossville Mission had left its mark on him. Maurice looked thinner, his face more sallow, his jaw and cheek bones showing with a more grisly distinctness.

In his rage his little black, twisted mustache quivered over his drawn, pale lips and his big brown eyes burned with a hectic glow, deep in his head as the eyes of the plague-stricken. Even the marring pits in his face had hollowed to a hideous depth.

"But hold your silence, Mademoiselle Estelle," he snarled, as he laid hands on the York boat's gunwale and leaned over till his blazing face was within a foot of Molson's and the girl's. "No names, if you please."

"You are a dishonorable cur, Maurice," Estelle flashed hotly. "An old man anxious for word of his girl in the midst of a plague and you wouldn't ease his anxiety. You wouldn't deliver my letter. Why on earth didn't you do it?"

"Why didn't *mademoiselle* play fair with me?" countered Dolbeau swiftly. "You asked me to carry a letter to Roderick Clunis, and I promised. But at the same time I did not promise to deliver one to Wallace Molson, chief trader at Norway House. I would rather sink eternally in

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the Saskatchewan River there than carry your word to Molson."

"You opened Estelle's letter?" bellowed Molson.

He struck as he spoke, his open palm smiting Maurice across his pock-marked face and sending him staggering back against the crowd.

With a wild yell Maurice recovered his balance to spring, his hand falling to the skinning-knife in his belt, but Laterriere and a half-dozen more intervened, blocking him away from the York boat.

"Grab him," Molson shouted. "Don't let him get away to the Blackfeet. Hold him prisoner till we unload."

Laterriere grasped the free trader by the arms. Maurice yelled aloud in the Blackfoot tongue, and at his signal yell three or four bullets whined out of the long grass on the banks and thudded into the logs of the landing-stage.

"*Mon Dieu*, hees scouts, hees spies; look out dere," cried Laterriere.

"Down, men," ordered Molson. "Take cover."

He set the example, dropping to his knees in the bow of the York boat and forcing Estelle down under the shelter of the long pointed prow, while those on the landing fell flat, seeking what cover they could behind the timbers of the landing and the curve of the bank.

Laterriere, trying to hold his prisoner and at the same time avail himself of shelter, tripped Dolbeau up. They went down together, writhing and rolling, and before Laterriere knew it the free trader slipped through his fingers like a snake and darted up the shore.

Under cover, some of the post men had their weapons out. Half a dozen snap shots sang after Dolbeau through the deceptive moonlight, but fleeing like an apparition, he reached the screen of some low bushes unhalted and dived from sight. Tensely the Fort à la Mauve men and Molson's massed fleet waited, but there came no more firing. Laterriere arose cautiously, stepping slowly along the landing, his big pistol outflung.

"Onlee hees Blackfeet scouts," he nodded to Molson, peering inquisitively over the York boat's prow. "But dere'll soon be more. Dey've gone for de main body, an' dat ain't ver' far away. Dey'll be here lak prairie fire an' Peter Beaudet groanin' in hees blanket won't stop dem now."

"No," coincided Molson. "We have to close Fort à la Mauve with a snap. Laterriere, tell off men, half to strip the post, half to carry the necessary stuff to the mission door. The crews will pass it out."

WARNING Estelle to keep her sheltered position, Molson sprang up to direct his crews, while Laterriere told off the Fort à la Mauve men. Like fiends they went at their task. The trap-lines they were going out on would hold them till the Winter ended and they stripped the post of all the Winter gear.

In five minutes it was all stowed in the hunters' canoes which they rushed down to the landing. In another five minutes food, medicines and ammunition, enough to last the mission till Spring, were dropped at Saunders' door. Then Molson turned his attention to the provisioning of the Hudson's Bay Company's hunters who would drift out and scatter to the ends of the wilderness.

It was no orthodox giving of "debt," no weighing out to the exact and just ounce which would have to be returned in fur to the last skin. Molson gave with a lavish hand and kept no account against any man. When the Red Death stalked it was no time to barter. He simply divided what food, ammunition and medicines remained among the hunters, retaining only enough supplies to last him back to Norway House.

He had one hundred and sixty brawny men, working like bronze furies to unload, and like magic they cleared the York boats. Like magic, too, Laterriere's hunters ballasted and trimmed their canoes with the stuff as fast as it was shoved over the gunwales. The canoe fleet lay loaded, the York-boat fleet empty, both ready to push off.

"All clear," cried Molson as the last bundle was tossed out. "Shove away. They're coming. Listen to that."

It sounded like the patter of rain, light drops at first but growing to a drumming shower; the rush of the pagan Indians through the grass and leaves. The next moment the band burst into the moonlight close to the landing-stage, and Molson, staring intently to mark their numbers, saw that they were well over two hundred strong. Yelling wildly at first sight of the boats they came, fleet as deer, with Maurice

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Dolbeau in the lead fleeter than the fleetest Blackfoot.

"Stagger them with a volley," Molson commanded, snatching his own rifle from the bottom of the York boat. "Shoot and break their rush at the water's edge. Then we'll get a chance to float all the craft."

In a roar the guns of his crews and the Fort à la Mauve hunters bellowed out. It was erratic shooting, owing to the swift rush, most like potting at fantoms in the prairie growth, but here and there a spotted Blackfoot smote the ground full length.

They had hoped for surprize and the readiness of Molson's men shocked them forcibly. They hesitated and their pagan hearts that hated lead in the open withered under the vicious fire. The rush broke and less than half of it reached the landing. Maurice himself cursed the deserters as he strained forward to reach Molson's York boat before it could be shoved clear.

The Blackfeet at Dolbeau's back were too close for shooting. They were right at the water's edge, brandishing axes over the fleets, but Molson's men smashed them back with clubbed guns and flailing oars, clearing their gunwales with a terrific sweep. Not a moccasin touched their thwarts except Dolbeau's. Bearing some strange charm against injury, Maurice came through where the bulk of his band was flattened on the shore, leaping on to the bow of Molson's York boat, the skinning-knife he had drawn first on Molson still in his hand.

"*Dieu*, this is the only message I bring you, Molson," he gritted; "a message of steel."

The long blade flashed toward Molson's throat, but Molson's rifle-butt met it with a crash in mid-air. Maurice, his striking arm doubled up, his head rocked weirdly on his shoulders, was smashed from the York boat's prow into the river. Straight down in front of the fleet shoving clear, he dropped, and a dozen heavy keels ground him under.

"I guess he has his wish, Estelle," murmured Molson grimly. "He swore he would rather sink in the Saskatchewan than allow contact between us. Now," suddenly raising his voice in a shout to the crews, "everything afloat."

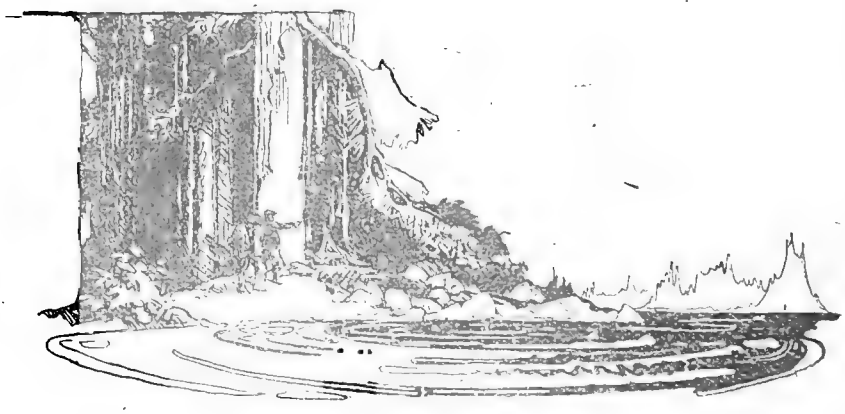
Like lightning the paddles of the canoe fleet dipped, whirling the light craft away from the landing littered with stunned and wounded Blackfeet. With a tremendous heave the long spruce poles of the York boats shot them in the wake of the canoes. The oarsmen with room to work their oars squatted in their places and bent their backs with a mighty pull.

"Mid-stream," Molson directed them, leading down in the first craft as he had led up.

He caught Estelle's hand, pressing her fingers gently as he steadied her to a comfortable seat.

"Midstream and Norway House, Estelle," he whispered. "I have guaranteed to deliver you there. Do you trust your messenger this time?"

"Yes, with a perfect trust," Estelle whispered back.



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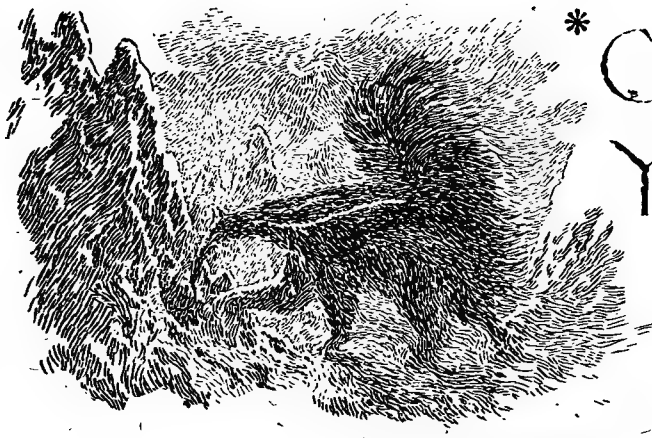

*CITIZEN YURUMI

By F. St. Mars

Author of "Ol' Makaw."

DEEP in the mysterious dim heart of the South American jungle, upon the bare, soft black mold that was the accumulated vegetable decay of centuries, close against the mighty buttress of a tree whose straight, unbranched stem shot into the air two hundred feet—a column in a cathedral of a hundred thousand columns—a big mass of fur lay inert. Impossible to guess what it might be, except that some of the hair was actually sixteen inches long, that it was black-brown and gray, and that—it breathed! Beyond that—nothing, no shape, form, limbs, head, nothing but long, long fur, stiff and harsh.

High aloft, some sudden outcry of the forest, in which the screams of parrots and macaws unseen among the far uplifted overworld of the forest-roof predominated, was followed by a sudden commotion. From the ground nothing at so great a height could be seen save interlaced branches, lianas, aerial roots and creepers; but something could be felt.

With a series of minor crashes, growing in volume, a great heavy nut, big as a cannon-ball, came hurtling down and buried itself with a thud deep in the mold so close to the heap of fur that breathed, that, had that same not been sheltered by part of the immense wood buttress, it is conceivable that the sleep would have ended forever in death.

As it was, the furry mass began to move. If startled, it had a strangely deliberate way of showing the fact. It unfolded itself as if tomorrow would do, and sat up at last upon its haunches, dog-fashion. His head might have been a cucumber, if it had not been black. His body, big and bear-like, heavily, hairily clothed, looked as if it had been sat upon by an elephant.

His tail, carried curved, à la pomeranian dog, or umbrella, was the mass of hair that breathed; it had covered up its owner completely. That wonder of a tail was as big as the whole beast, and he was not very small, measuring some four feet himself, in fact.

Black and gray he was, grayer forward, except for black cucumber head and a black wedge pointing back from chest to hips, edged with white lines, and a gray stiff mane. Add to this, middle front claws larger than the whole foot, veritable living trowels, and a tongue like a whip-lash dipped in glue, and you've got him—Yurumi, the giant ant-eater.

The beast with the head like a bird, the long, long mouth with its tiny opening at the end, and no teeth, sat bolt upright with strange bladeless shoulders, swinging his head low, pendulum-fashion, for quite a long time. He seemed not to be a beast of this world at all, rather some strange apparition of a weird fanciful dream, but he was in a world that was unto itself, a very fairyland full of forms stranger than or as strange as he.

And he was taking note of everything with his minute eyes, his little ears, his small nose at the tip of his grotesque curving snout, just as any ordinary and less bizarre wild thing would. He was tabulating

**This is an Off-the-Trail story. See first contents page.*

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the sounds, of birds mostly, sudden-swift, feverish bursts of odd song, and of frogs; he was sifting the scents, strange musky scents of almost unknown beasts, sickly scents of flowers, peculiar scents of decaying mold, fungi, wood.

Above him, one to two hundred feet aloft, where the towering columns of the great trees alone branched in one bursting interlaced sea of green, where the vast overworld of the forest roof lived and had its being and never touched earth, the heat in the burning sun must have been terrific, but down below, down among the dim shadows, where the giant ant-eater sat, it was always cool for comfort.

Suddenly Yurumi stopped swaying his head and held it pointed in one direction. A little quadrille wren, who had been flitting among the almost fairy-slender twigs that alone grew low down, ceased his passionate cascades of the world's finest song and was still. An armadillo, all rattling plates and claws—a living tank—dived all at once for a hole, and a snake, like a flung spear of green, shot into a rotting tree-bole. A great green lizard, unnoticed till then, scuttled round a buttress and a partridge-like bird burst up with a whir and vanished.

Then a twig snapped, and the form of an Indian appeared, gliding in and out among the huge-groined trunks with the quick, silent jungle-tread of all the forest-dwellers. He did not seem to see Yurumi, who sat now quite still in the dimness, and he appeared to be entirely absorbed in his own thoughts. Moreover, he was, for an Indian, in a hurry, and—rare thing—for once, not hunting.

If persisted in, the man's course would take him right on top of the beast. Yet he kept straight on—Yurumi presumably watching him with his tiny eyes—till within a few yards only, when he stopped and stared suddenly. He actually had not seen the still, somewhat bear-like form in his path till that animal sat up slowly on his haunches with his arms held out, as if to say "Come!" his terrible, knife-bladed claws gleaming a little, his absolutely absurd head a little on one side—waiting. That is the approved fighting-pose of the great ant-eater, but it is so seldom adopted among the tribe whose motto is "Defense, not defiance," that the Indian might well seem a little astonished—for an Indian.

THE man, however, was not armed, save for his knife and a club, nor did he wish to eat now of the black musky flesh, at any other time appreciated. He was a messenger, but not of death. He turned and made to pass on one side through a gap between the trees, but the glisten of a green Tabaria snake in the fairway there turned him back.

But on the other side a forest giant had fallen, letting down a torrent of burning, glaring sun which in its turn had ushered in a riot of tangled vegetation—not otherwise encountered beneath the zone of sunlight high aloft—that defied penetration except at great labor. And the Indian was in a hurry. A companion had been bitten by an alligator and needed help to carry him to the village.

The man loosened his knife.

He could not understand why the peaceful Yurumi should hold his ground unless cornered. He did not know that the beast was cornered with his mate, who carried her single young one on her back under her unbrella tail behind—on one side the snake and on the other, in the tangle, a crouched and hidden ocelot, the leopard of those parts, guarding her kittens under the prostrate tree.

Then the man ran in.

He expected the ant-eater to break away at the last moment and was quite surprized to find himself slashing desperately at the quaintly shaped mass of gray and black fur, dodging the while Yurumi's efforts to hug him—an embrace which would perhaps have syelled death. But the Indian might as well have saved himself the trouble. It is doubtful whether he even drew blood.

The man shifted his weapons and began to belabor the ant-eater about the head with his club. He took a six-inch gash across the thigh from those amazing claws and his leg lay bare to the bone for that. But the man, at least, had pluck. So had the beast. Neither gave way; nor did that extraordinary long, narrow, tapering cranium give way; it might have been made of cast iron or stone or contained no brain at all, for all the effect the beating had upon it. It was a most astonishing head and neither cracked nor caved in under blows that would have pulverized any other beast.

The Indian drew back.

Yurumi continued to sit up, cucumber

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head swaying and curved arms out.

The Indian, however, gave it up, threw a fallen branch at the snake, who removed like a gleam of steel, and faded out that way among the ranked still tree-boles, soundless as a ghost.

Then fell the second nut. A spider monkey in argument with a snoozing sloth seventy feet up had dislodged it, and it came down—*whop!*

As many people are killed by falling nuts and leaves in the forest as die from malaria. They are Nature's aerial bombs. The nut caught Yurumi on the top of his cucumber head and he collapsed in a great hairy heap, as if his legs had been plucked from under him.

"And that is the end of *him*," Fate seemed to say, and passed on, looking for something else to slay.

The sun cascade in the swath cut by the fallen forest tree began to slant; the clouds of yellow butterflies started to look for bed; the red howling monkeys upon the roof overworld above opened their deep scale-practise—*fortissimo* to *mezzo-forte*—a bird voice somewhere—a hanaqua, or little guan—was asking "What o'clock?" the roaring grunt of a bull alligator came up from some hidden backwater of the great river and parrots and parakeets, bound for their roosting-places, went by, high and unseen, overhead, with a rush like heavy rain upon leaves; an agouti crept like a rabbit from some hidden hole, with a tiny rustle; a nightjar, close by on the ground, began to wheeze incessantly, and, still more incessant, the shrilling of the myriad little jungle frogs reached its climax.

Then the pervading mystery and sanctity of nature's vast cathedral of a hundred thousand pillars was torn by a sudden agonized scream, coming from no one could say where, uttered by goodness knows whom, and—before one realized what was happening darkness shut down and it was night.

Presently came a grunting, choking roar of peculiar harshness. It rasped through the echoing forest and died, and all voices were stilled. The jaguar is to South America almost what the lion is to Africa. Larger than any leopard, his reign is even more cruel and sinister.

And at the sound that heap of fur, Yurumi the ant-eater, rose as if from the dead, slowly and with great deliberation, and, seated upon his haunches, began to clean his long, toothless, tubular snout, very much as a bird cleans its beak upon a branch, against his somewhat crooked knee.

He had only been stunned by the falling nut, that was all—stunned, when any other beast under the same blow would have been killed several times over. Perhaps Nature, having placed him in a realm of falling things and tied him to the earth, had half-repented and specially hardened him lest his race be wiped out utterly—by his foes and the death that came from above.

Then, swinging about, Yurumi trotted off. His enormous trowel of a middle claw being too big even to walk on, he had to turn it back and progress, as it were, on his wrist; while with his little hind feet he progressed in the ordinary way, flat. And he always trotted just like that, making haste slowly, his wonderful umbrella of a tail held straight out behind, and his arched beak of a mouth, like a curlew's, well lifted in front.

Seen thus, in the little dappled spots of moonlight—exactly like an oscelot's coat—he was a big beast, well over seven feet long, and a most uncanny—a bear without shoulders and with the head of a bird, a fearsome apparition to come upon suddenly round a corner, if one did not know that he could not bite if he would, his mouth being no more than a tube.

After hunting about for a bit—always working toward the river, for he loved damp ground—Yurumi found the edge of the forest—it stopped as suddenly as if burned off by fire—and passed out into the moonlight. Apparently this was a graveyard of the ancients, a still and desolate place bristling with mounds, red and hard as granite, and inhabited only by one opossum that snarled devilishly and two hideous vampire bats that fled.

THEN it was that Yurumi showed what his middle foreclaw was for, and the meaning of his absurd head. He stopped at a mound. He half-sat down. He got to work with his forefeet.

A bullet from a .400 bore express rifle fired at one of those mounds would be considerably mushed up, but the mound would show no hurt. Yurumi, however, had had his tools fashioned by Nature, who is an obstinate old dame that recognizes no

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obstacles. The beast fairly made the steel-plate-like caked earth fly and in a very few minutes had his cucumber nose into a fair sized aperture. But it was with the living that he dealt, not the dead.

These mounds were, in fact, the city ramparts of termites, white ants, and it is written in white-ant law that wheresoever there appeareth a breach in the wall, thither shall hurry all and sundry to drive forth the foe and close the breach up again.

This foe, however, was a very peculiar one—a long and lively whip-lash, well glued, that darted here, wriggled there, withdrew stuck as full of termites as beads on a string, vanished into a long tube and was back again, whipping up more ants with lightning rapidity.

Such a foe had not been allowed for in the termites' military code. There was nothing in their city laws that told them how to meet the national calamity. They were a machine; they could only do as they always did and under rigid discipline of custom, namely: rush out to the foe and—be whipped up. The ants simply vanished into the tube, and that was all.

Yurumi simply wiped up ants because he was born that way, designed that way and knew that way to live. 'Twas a fairly useful way, too, seeing that he lived in a land where there must assuredly be more ants of more grades in size, and of more vile deadliness, than in all the rest of the world put together. Every tree was alive with them, every bush, all the ground, every flower, leaf, fruit; every beast had to take them into account, and every bird knew that at least one out of every three nestlings in her nest would likely be slain by them.

But if you have your head stuck into a hole—for which purpose it was expressly designed—you can not see everything around and a bit more beside, as is vitally necessary in a wild where death is more a daily—and nightly—question than in any other wild on earth.

For that reason, perhaps, and for no other, the maned wolf—who was neither a wolf nor maned, but a wild dog, not a wild tame dog, but a wild wild dog, and almost the swiftest thing on four legs at that—got in on his fine work.

Yurumi was not quite so painfully aware of the fact as he might have been if he had been any other animal, because of the heavy fur on his flanks and the almost chrome-like toughness of his skin. Therefore, that awful chopping stroke of all the wild dogs, which should have been the beginning of the end, was only the beginning of the beginning with Yurumi. He was not going to bleed to death from it, but by the electric convulsion that possessed him on receipt, painful things were likely to happen to the giver of it before he got in another bite.

Yurumi was round and up on his haunches quicker than lightning. His two great foreclaws gleamed in the moonlight like steel shears, and they said more than any words.

Aguara-guazu, the maned wolf, skirmished largely on his long thin legs, his white throat, ears, tail-tip and fangs shining together. Aguara-guazu thought he had delivered a crippling stroke at the first go. When he came flying in in his finest chop-and-come-again style, however, he did not think.

He found himself too busy parrying with his teeth those razor-edged twin claws, too busy altogether; and some of the peculiar, bear-like, round-arm hooks of Yurumi he did not parry. The result was terrible; it was also noisy, for Aguara-guazu acknowledged receipt of each hook with a yell that even in a land of unearthly yells was awful beyond endurance.

Aguara-guazu boasted a very striking black saddle on his bright tawny coat, with jet stockings to match, but the moon showed as he rolled clear—'twas the only way—that the black saddle appeared to be tied on with red ribbons, and the jet stockings had turned scarlet. 'Twas warning enough of the unwisdom of cornering a giant ant-eater and making him fight, but the wild dog was past warnings, as wild dogs are apt to be when they taste blood and go berserk in the excitement of the chase.

Yurumi met his attack and hugged him to his breast. There was one terrible sound of the worry. It could be seen that white teeth and shining claws worked very quickly. Then Aguara-guazu howled. Then he yelled. Then he wriggled and kicked and bit himself clear. Then he ran away, limping, his tail between his legs and red drops of blood chasing him every yard of the way.

IF YURUMI was hurt seriously, he had a strange way of showing it. He watched the lone wolf—maned wolves are always lone; they never go in

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packs—out of sight, sitting up dog-fashion with his absurd head swinging, then set to work again, carried by assault more white-ant cities and fed for another hour.

By that time the cicadas and the frogs and the nightjars filled the lonely night silence with their incessant vamping, and fireflies filled the visible night with lantern processions as of fairies, mad dances and drifting constellations. Then, catching one over the heart as in a grip of ice, a scream that choked broke into a sobbing wail and died to a moan and to silence.

Nobody knows what that scream is. The Indians of the forest say it is an evil spirit. It is not heard every night nor everywhere, but, once heard, it remains with the listener all the rest of his life and comes back to him in dreams—terrifyingly.

As that unearthly plaint died, Yurumi stopped feeding, wiped the sticky "glue" from his tongue that had collected on his laughable long nose off his crooked foreleg, and trotted back to the forest. It was as if that unspeakable scream had been a warning, had made him uneasy, as if, almost—he guessed.

The primeval forest at night is not a pleasant place. Gloomy even in the mid-day glare, after darkness it is as black as the pit. Nor do the fireflies help; they are so very small, and the empty cavern of the mighty forest is so very big. Moreover, things move about by night that are never dreamed of by day, grunting things, and things that squeal—some yell. You can not see them, but you can smell them; for they carry strange odors among them, some like musk. And you can hear that the overworld of the forest is restlessly moving too; sloths are at feed, giant bats whisper about as if ghosts were shuffling cards.

Yurumi, however, cared for none of these things. He minded always strictly his own business; and his size, strength, armament and reputation were such that few sought to mind it for him. How he found his way among the colossal buttresses in the cloaked blind void is a mystery. It is doubtful that it could have been with his apologies for eyes.

But, seeing or feeling, he got along; there was pace in his trot as well as clumsiness. Then there was not. The beast had pulled up, rigid as a bear at gaze, still as stone. A new sound had broken into the mystery jazz of the stillness. A coughing roar, short, sharp, unutterably harsh.

And Yurumi waited only to hear it, to note, as a sailor notes the direction of the sound of guns, its position. Then he galloped. He would have looked very funny if seen by day, for he had to gallop on his wrists, and he shuffled oddly. By night it was not funny. Nothing could be funny in that place at that hour. It was simply a sudden, hurrying, scuffling sound.

That last hundred yards he covered at top speed quite unexpected of him, and it seemed as if he approached a cock-pit of devils. It was, however, in actual fact, only one evil jaguar attacking his intended.

Yurumi was courting. The female ant-eater had a young one, truly, but old enough to fend for himself, to be cast adrift. Yurumi knew that, of course; so apparently did the jaguar. Yurumi had no interest in saving the life of some other ant-eater's son and heir, but every interest in saving that youngster's mother. Not that he was a gallant beast, mind you, but he had faith.

Besides, ant-eaters are lonely, solitary beasts. He might seek far before he found another possible wife; and if it came to fighting, it might as well be a jaguar as another male ant-eater.

Yurumi arrived *bang* in front of the great charging cat and sat down—*plop!* He was up on his haunches with his claws ready in an instant. His tail was thrown round him like a cloak. But the jaguar was six feet long, backed by all the nickel-spring-steel, all the fury, all the cruel, keen, wicked, lithe agility of the cats. Murder was more than a trade with her, it was an obsession and mad fury in the execution of it that made her dreaded beyond her mere strength.

Nine times out of ten the jaguar would have checked. Strategy is, after all, a rule of the cats, and surprize. This time, however, was the tenth. The jaguar had cubs to feed. Enough. Nay, worse. The cubs were near, hungry, crying for food—food the old spotted she-fiend had just failed, always by inches, to surprize and catch for them for forty-eight hours past.

No, that jaguar did not check. She came right in. Some unlucky last slash of a little peccary boar's dagger tusk a while ago had touched her Achilles tendon. 'Twas nothing much, but just took that extra fine edge off her agility that is necessary for one who habitually preys upon spider monkeys at an altitude of one to two hundred

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feet from the ground, or ambushes some of the swiftest rodent wild people on earth.

It takes some pluck to stand up to the full charge of a half-demented female jaguar; but it is sometimes the quietest people that have the most pluck. Just three yards behind Yurumi in the dark stood his prospective mate. Somehow he knew she was there; but nothing could be seen except the jaguar's flaming eyes hurling at him like tracer bullets.

The charge was meant for the female ant-eater, and it might have killed her. Yurumi, however, having plumped himself down, or rather up, *bang* in the way, caught it fairly amidships with an impact you could have heard yards off, and he rolled over three times, big beast as he was, with the force of it, the jaguar glued to him like a grappling-iron.

Yurumi said nothing at all. He just clasped the foe to his chest and hugged.

The jaguar said a very great deal in an explosive, spitting, snarling way; for she felt her back being cut to pieces as with knives. But if the ant-eater's foreclaws are terrible, so is the frightful levered kick of a jaguar's hind ones. It generally disembowels most beasts, and this jaguar kicked and roweled as she had never done before.

Yurumi did not unhug. He should have done so—ripped up—but he did not. He continued to treat the jaguar's back as if it were a white ants' city. As he was hurled over backward he had sat upon that amazing great tail of his; it had doubled under him, and now it was impeding the jaguar's hind legs like a net. Biting, clawing, tearing, rending, she could not properly get through the mass of sixteen-inch hair that covered its owner's belly, nor could she rip to tatters properly in her own peculiar way his neck.

Her custom was to kill by a twist—breaking the neck. This prey had no jaw to get a purchase upon for the twist. Moreover Yurumi was cutting into her spine—cutting—chiseling—hugging—cutting—holding—cutting—cutting—hacking— *Aargh!*

The magnificent lithe yellow body, with its daring contrast of jet rosettes, straightened suddenly back and back into a bow—rigid, quivering. Then as slowly it came forward again. The cruel talons pawed at empty air. The big fangs snapped at space. The head fell sidewise, and the whole superb masterpiece of Nature's last word in the hunting-mammal line collapsed in a lifeless inert heap.

The battle was done and won.

Yurumi slowly and dumbly—as ever—disentangled himself and staggered away sidewise into the pitchy dark. But he could not go far—even he of the reinforced skin. He lay down within a few yards, his fantasy of a head doubled between his forepaws. On his side he lay, and his wonder of a tail covered all carefully like a rug.

And as he started this story, so he finished it—a great gray and black fur heap. Only with this difference: Neither he nor she was there when the dawn broke.

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NO WONDER

By W. C. Tuttle

Author of "Helped by a Horse Doctor," "When the Pilgrims Hit Piperock," etc.

I RECKON it's a fact that the United States is the melting-pot for the world. She takes 'em in, melts 'em to a certain point and then pours out everything from scientists to sheep-herders. What comes in between them two high-minded occupations I dunno, 'cause we only gets the two kinds out here.

Honest to grandma, we do get some queer pelicans out in the boundless West. Seems like every scientist from the plain ordinary bug-hunter to some high-minded, red-sealed, hammer-pcaking *hombre*, who looketh for the antiquated framework of a dippydocus or pack-o'-durham, comes to our Piperock cabin, looking for advice, guidance or just to interrupt the peaceful existence of me and that long, lean suffering hunk of humanity—"Magpie" Simpkins.

We've helped 'em hunt for everything from the effects of sheep upon the human mind to why the coyote howls at the moon—and made good. That is, we're still alive. I can stand for science, but when I looks upon the fat, pink face of Reginald Alfred Jackson Hilton I know that somebody has swiped the silver lining off our cloud. Yes, he introduced himself by all them names, and Magpie wrote it all down on our cabin door for fear we'd misplace it and not know how to call him in when it rained.

Reginald needed somebody to do his thinking for him, except when it comes to thinking about Violet. Yeah, he could think about her—to a certain point. Violet's other name was Robertson-Clark.

Seems that Violet's ma was so stuck on the family name that when she married Clark she just hooked Robertson on behind and led it through life. Reginald tells us that Violet thinks of him all the time, but if Violet is much good mentally she don't have to waste much of her brain to do that.

Reginald was about as much use as a .22 cartridge in a eight-gage shotgun. I don't know why we let him stop with us. I voted to tie a can on his big, hammer-headed mule and point the outfit towards Canada, but Magpie just looks at Reginald, sort of awed-like and takes off his hat. It don't even faze Reginald when Magpie says, "Yes, ma'am" to him.

"I wish to stay," says Reginald, and the son-of-a-gun did stay.

He wasn't neither useful nor ornamental. Said his pa owned a railroad. Pa opines that Reginald ain't much use, as he is, so Reginald came West to make a man of himself.

"Uh-huh," says I. "And stopped here to make —— fools of us."

"I read it in a book," says he.

"By Barnum?" I asks.

"I expect so. Anyway it was by a good writer, re'lly. Told about a fellow who got in bad at home. He came out West and got to be foreman of a cattle-farm, or foreman of a mine, or foreman of a lumber-mill or ——"

"Herded sheep," adds Magpie.

"I expect so. Turned out to be a wonder, re'lly."

"He would," agrees Magpie, "More shepherds turns out to be wonders than any other race on earth."

"I'll stay," says Reginald, "and maybe I'll turn out to be a wonder some day."

"The sheep need you," says I.

Reginald didn't look like a person who

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would turn out to be a wonder, especially our first look at him, setting on the ground in front of our cabin door. We steps out there and looks at him and his mule.

"Seven," says he.

"Seven what?" I asks.

"Times. That quadruped doesn't want me on his back, re'lly."

The Lord only knows where Reginald picked up his wardrobe, but it wasn't west of Chicago. He's got a green shirt with pink stripes, lavender-colored wool chaps, Baden-Powell hat and yaller boots. His belt is awful new and yaller, and in the holster reposes a .32 bulldog pistol.

Reginald is sort of fat all over, pink fat, and he's got bat-ears. I don't like them ears. All I've ever met hear everything they hadn't ought to and makes you repeat everything they should have heard the first time.

"How did you happen to get a mule instead of a horse?" asks Magpie.

"Fellow told me that a mule could stand more than a horse. Can they?"

"Well," says Magpie, "that mule only throwed you seven times today, which shows that a mule can stand a lot."

That's how Reginald Alfred Jackson Hilton came to us. I wanted to bar the door and keep him moving, but Magpie says:

"He's worth lookin' into, Ike. The poor kid needs guidance, and if we let him go somebody will kill him. He ain't got brains enough to unsaddle that mule, and his blood will be upon our head if we don't hang on to him long enough to hammer some sense into his head."

"His blood may be on our hands," I agrees, "and some of it upon our heads, but it's his blood, Magpie. Better let him mosey on while our corpuscles are intact."

"He can't hurt nobody, Ike, even if he shot 'em with that blunt pistol. We'll let him stay a while."

"And get to be a wonder," adds Reginald.

"You can't help it," says Magpie. "You're a wonder now, and wonders never cease."

"I'll do my best, re'lly. I read that in a book. I love books, don't you? Poetry and so forth."

"And so forth," nods Magpie.

"What have you read?"

"Undershirt."

Reginald studies this for a while, and then says—

"Are you spoofing me?"

Magpie grabbed my wrist, and my bullet made a leaky spot in the cabin roof.

"Remain calm, Ike," advises Magpie while Reginald seems to look for a place to ooze out of the cabin. "I'm danged sure I don't know what that word means, but we can live it down."

"All right," says I. "Dry-nurse him if you wants to, but I ain't even going to be a silent pardner in the affair."

"I'll try and raise him without help," nods Magpie sad-like. "I'll put him on a dynamite diet and give him injections of sheep-dip and horse-liniment twice a day. He may pull through."

"I hope to get along," says Reginald, looking up at that bullet-hole. "I want to amount to something."

"You may," grins Magpie. "It won't be any wonder if you don't, and you'll be one if you do."

"Scenery" Sims, our sheriff, who is a human periwinkle with a squeaky voice and squeaky boots, comes up to see Reginald.

"He ain't neither game nor predatory animile," says Scenery, "so I don't know whether to protect him or not. You ought to brand him if you wants to keep him."

"He's all right," argues Magpie. "He's lived twenty years."

"In the East. When I looks upon him, Magpie, I'm filled with these thoughts. The Lord made Adam and then took one of Adam's ribs and made for him a woman, didn't he? Well, this maverick is plumb safe from matrimony, 'cause it would take all of his ribs, back-bone, inside and outsides, from toe-nails to dandruff to make a rib for one woman. He, he, he!"

"Yet he loves a woman," says I.

"Don't prove nothin'," squeaks Scenery. "I had a pet fool-hen once what thought a lot of me. It ain't hard to love."

"Not when you love a girl like Violet," states Reginald.

"After lookin' at you I'd say it ain't," agrees Scenery.

Magpie told Reginald he'd better put his mule in the corral or it might wander away.

"I don't mind, re'lly," says he. "I intend to burn my bridges behind me. Some day I'll go home and show them what the glorious West has done for me."

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"I hope you don't mention names," says Magpie.

I RECKON that Reginald didn't find things just like they told about in that book.

One day "Jay Bird" Whittaker, who owns the Cross J outfit and most of the Paradise bank, rides up to our cabin and orates thusly: "In regard to that there pro-te-jay of yours, Magpie. That cross between a lulu and a loco—know whom I am speaking about?"

Magpie nods.

"Hopple the son-of-a-gun! He's expressed a wish to be foreman of the Cross J. Uh-huh. Accepted without mercy."

"Hire him?" grins Magpie.

" 'Telescope' Tolliver kissed him."

"My——! What did he do, Jay Bird?"

"Thanked Telescope. Yessir, he did. Telescope took a liking to him and made him a present of a gray bronc and ——"

"Now that wasn't no way to do," complains Magpie. "Likely gave him that 'Weaver' bronc, eh? Where's the remains?"

"Lemme finish, can't yuh? The Weaver throwed him over the corral fence and never broke a pole. I brought the funny jigger over in my buckboard, and the last I seen of him he was up in Ricky's barber-shop tryin' to find out if there's a vacancy in the Forest Service in Death Valley. Pete Gonyer told him there was."

"Ike, will you go and get him?" asks Magpie, "I mean, 'bring him,' Ike—not 'get him.' "

"I will not," says I, shoving my gun back into the holster. "I starts on a labor of love and you throws a bomb into my motive power. Go herd your own lambs."

Reginald ain't got much sense, but he's got sort of an animal instinct which sends him home at meal-time. Magpie is cooking supper when he shows up. Reginald acts sort of melancholy and after while he says—

"A year ago today I left home."

"Year?" grunts Magpie. "Where you been all the time?"

"West."

"West of what?"

"Well—er—New York. When I think of it my head gets in a whirl, re'lly it does. I don't know what to do."

"Spoonful of sody in warm water," says I. "You've got gas pains."

"Perhaps," says he sad-like. "You see, it was like this: I met a man from Silver Bend in New York, who wanted me to come West. I started out and I got as far as Boston, and I stayed there and wrote letters and sent them to this man at Silver Bend to post for me. Wasn't it rather clever of me, re'lly?"

"I see that you ain't to be trusted," says Magpie. "You have deceived them what believed in you."

"Well, they—er—re'lly, they dud-didn't believe in me—much. That's why I came West to do big things. Oh I have tried. Today I tried to be foreman of the Cross J cattle-farm, but—I must do something very soon. Re'lly the outlook is dreary, and I have only two more days."

"Internal combustion or has somebody promised to kill you?" I asks.

"I wrote to them," says he tearful-like. "I got that book I told you about and I had a lot of things happen to me like they did to the feller in that book. I—I shu-shot a outlaw and I got to be foreman of the ranch and I——"

"Saved the girl," adds Magpie, but Reginald shakes his head, sad-like.

"No—not yet. The girl is Violet."

"The story ain't finished yet, eh?"

"Two more days," wails Reginald. "Two more days. How can I make good?"

"Two more days for what?" asks Magpie.

"I got a letter today. Violet is coming out here, She eloped alone to come and marry me. She says I'm her hero. She'll get in Paradise tomorrow and then she'll take the stage for here next morning. Tells me to be there to meet her."

Reginald wipes the tears off his nose and sniffles real hard.

"But I won't be there," says he. "I can't meet her. I ain't no hero!"

"No," says Magpie, with his mouth full of hot beans, "you sure as —— ain't."

"Come and eat something and maybe you'll feel better," says I.

"Eat? I can't eat—I've got to think!"

"Well, as long as you've got to—do the best you can," says I. "But grub on your stummick ain't going to hurt your brains none to speak about."

"If we only had some fish," says Magpie serious-like. "Fish is brain food."

"I used to eat a lot of fish," sighs Reginald.

"Another theory busted," grunts Magpie,

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and then sets there and lets his meal grow cold while he seems to think deep.

I KNOW the symptoms. Magpie's got an idea and is weighing every angle of it. Magpie never put his ideas into words until they're all figured out to the sharp end of nothing whittled to a point. They've got to be perfectly legitimate, plausible, et cettery, and then they won't work a-tall.

At times he squints at Reginald and then he turns his eyes towards me and all the time he's fingering his long mustache. After while he puts some gravy in his coffee and pours some sugar over his potatoes.

"Two more days," says Reginald sad-like. "You see, I'm her hero."

After while Magpie rolls a cigaret and leans back from the table.

"They say that heroes are born—not made, but we're going to prove that they're all wrong."

"You go ahead and prove it," says I. "But leave the name of Harper out of the experiment. *Sabe?* Right now I'm chemically pure in mind and body and I expect to retain my girlish laughter for many moons. Deal me out."

"Ike—" Magpie sets there, squinting his long nose away from the smoke of his cigaret and staring at the ridge-pole of the cabin—"Ike, me and you are two old pelicans who has likely never felt love's young dream and ain't qualified to pass upon the —— foolishness of such a condition. Love only comes once, they say, and that is in the Spring of a man's existence.

"Two hearts which beat as one—as the poet says, and the poets ought to know.

"Here is a chance to make love's young dream come true. Violet is looking for a hero. She can't see nothin' but a hero. Yonder sets the hero. Me and you know —— well he ain't heroic, Ike, but we don't count."

"She'll find out he ain't," says I.

"Take time, Ike, and maybe by that time we'll have shipped 'em East. *Sabe?* No matter how he falls down in the East—he'll be a hero here. We'll make him look like one, anyway."

"Lay down your hand," says I. "You ain't showed a pair yet."

"Violet comes to Paradise tomorrow and comes here the next day on the stage. Reginald is going to be in Paradise in time to come back on the stage with her. Reginald is going to have a gun full of blank shells. When the stage hits Wind River crossing there's going to be a hold-up. *Sabe?* Two men are going to step out and stick up that stage.

"They're going to order the passengers out. Reginald is going to come out. He's going to pull his gun before he gets out, because it takes him too long otherwise. He's going to come out of that stage spoutin' smoke and gun-wads, and me and you, Ike, are going to turn a flip-flop into the brush and beat it. Get the idea? He'll be a hero."

Reginald takes it all in with his mouth open wide. Then he swallers hard and says—

"Don't I capture neither one of you?"

"You —— fool! What do you want?" howls Magpie. "Want us to get twenty years in the penitentiary?"

"Oh," says Reginald, thinking it over. And then he says. "I—I've told them I was a dead shot."

"The danged fool wants to kill one of us!" says I. "Of all the blamed nerve I ever heard about, he's got it all."

"You don't kill nor capture anybody," says Magpie. "All you do is to chase us away, save the girl and the money."

"Well," says Reginald, "well, I'm obliged to you, I'm sure. Wouldn't it be better if I just happened to ride up on a horse and shoot at you? Make it more like the feller did in that book."

"—— your book!" snaps Magpie. "This is real life."

"With a touch of death," says I. "Art Miller will likely get loco and spray us both with buckshot."

"Naw he won't," argues Magpie. "I know Art too well. He'll stick his hands right up and he'll likely hold 'em up until we're a mile away. Maybe we'd better have Reginald tell him when to take his hands down."

"I'll try to remember it," agrees Reginald. "Why will he have his hands up?"

"There are times in my life when I'm a—a——"

Magpie reaches over and picks up his dictionary and peruses it a while.

"There are times in my life when I'm a—a potential murderer."

"Yes," says I. "And the rest of the time

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you're a —— fool, Magpie. We ought to let that unsuspectin' female come out here and see Reginald as he is."

"Yes, Ike, that would be your way of doing it, but I—I'm crazy, I reckon; but I can't help wanting to start 'em out right. She'll find out soon enough that her Reginald ain't no hero."

"I'll do my best," says Reginald. "But you ain't told me yet what he'll have his hands in the air for?"

"Prayin'," explains Magpie, "for lightning to strike you."

"It don't look like rain," says Reginald.

Magpie raises up and sets on both of his hands. I do the same thing. It's a good thing to do when you've got a perfectly good gun hangin' on to you and a overwhelming desire to use it. Sort of gives you something to do with your hands.

"I don't know why you ever came out here," says Magpie. "Why didn't you stay in Boston?"

"The man who was sending my letters moved away and I had to come. Didn't know anybody else to take it up with. I wish I had known you before."

"I'd 'a' moved too," says Magpie.

WELL, the next day we pulled the stingers out of some cartridges and loaded Reginald's gun for him. It was the first time it had been loaded and he likely wondered why we put them brass things into the cylinder, but he didn't ask. Magpie showed him how to pull the trigger.

"Might as well give him a monkey-wrench," says I. "He'll forget to shoot."

"Are you spoofing me again?" asks Reginald. "There isn't any such thing."

"As what?" I answers.

"A monkey-ranch."

I went outside and shot three times at a tin can. Whether I hit it or not don't matter. Magpie watched me reload my gun and then held out his hand.

"Look at it shake, Ike. All unstrung. That's what a feller gets for foolin' with heroes."

"Do they re'lly grow monkeys?" asks Reginald.

"Show him a monkey-wrench, Ike," sobs Magpie. "I can't. I mustn't look at him until I gets my natural desires under control."

I showed Reginald a monkey-wrench and tried to explain, but it was a waste of energy. I showed him how to hold it so it looks like a gun and he sort of gets the idea.

"Just as good as a gun in a hold-up," says Magpie.

"Maybe in the East," I admits. "But not out here."

"Aw, shucks! I could hold up a bank with a monkey-wrench and the banker would swear I had a cannon."

"Not here," I argues, "Somebody'd kill you too quick."

"Naw, they wouldn't, Ike. It's the power of suggestion. Know what I mean? They'd take it for granted that you had a gun in your hands. Shucks, they'd never think you was fool enough to have anything but a loaded gun."

All me and Magpie needs is a slight difference of opinion to start a hy-iu argument, and this argument holds forth all the next day. Magpie offers his reasons why he's right, and then I sets up and howls that he's all wrong.

Reginald sets there and listens. Once in a while he opens his mouth to ask what it's about. We takes him in hand and explains all about it, and then in another hour he makes another inquiry. Busting in thataway sort of keeps the argument alive, and late in the afternoon we stops and calls it a draw.

We manages to find Reginald's mule and saddled it for him. We decides that his clothes are too prominent for a hero to wear, so we garbs him in an old shirt of Magpie's and took away his lavender chaps. His hat don't fit well, so I gives him an old one of mine. We explains the whole scheme to him and he understands perfectly.

He only fell off that mule once before he got out of sight down the road.

Me and Magpie don't need to rehearse. Magpie has been a sheriff, and I know quite a lot about robberies too.

We rode out early in the morning, fixed our masks and got all ready to be foiled by our hero. We aimed to pull it off right at the bank of the river as the driver pulls for the deluge.

Art Miller was plumb docile and likely wished his arms were twenty feet longer. He looked into the sky while he hooked one foot under the express box and up-ended it over a front wheel. I opens the door.

"Everybody outside!" says I.

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Comes a squeak, and out comes a little fat harness-drummer. He almost swallers his tongue when he sees me.

"The rest of you come out!" I ordered hoarse-like; but the rest don't come out, 'cause there ain't no rest.

"Get 'em all out!" croaks Magpie.

Just then I hears a noise and I looks down the road. Right into us comes a big mule, running like a deer, and on that mule's neck is Reginald, hanging to the head-stall with one hand while he reaches back and grasps the horn with the other. I grabbed that drummer and slammed him back into the stage and then threw myself backwards.

I seen the mule swing wide enough to miss the stage, but it whanged into the near wheeler on that team, played a billiard on a leader and then shot into the air and halfway across the river before it hit the wet.

That stage four went into their collars, and I seen Art Miller go over backwards on top of the stage with his arms still pointed at the sky, and into that river went them four horses, scared stiff, the stage and the driver, —— -bent-for-election, follering the lead of that locoed mule and our hero.

I crawls out of the brush and just then I sees Magpie coming up the bank. He's wet all over, but his mask is still on.

"What was the matter with that —— fool?" he asks. "Mule knocked me plumb into the river."

"If you was speaking of our hero," says I, "it's going to take about seven doctors and a couple of lawyers to answer your question."

"We've got to catch that stage, Ike!" yelps Magpie. "Lines dragging and no way to stop 'em."

We ducks over to our horses, lands into the saddles and just hits the road in time to feel perfectly sure that somebody is shooting at us. Some hunks of lead eases past us, one of which cuts a rosette off my chaps. Looking back, we beholds a couple of men, riding fast, and they appears to be throwing lead with both hands.

"—— the stuff that heroes are made off!" says I, and starts riding.

IT WAS some procession while it lasted.

We hit Calamity grade at forty miles an hour where the road is only wide enough for one rig at a time, and right there we catches the stage. We came around a turn, jumping high and handsome and slap bang into that passenger vehicle.

I gets a passing glimpse which seems to inform me that one wheel has met a rock, the same of which puts the outfit out of the race, and then my horse and Magpie's hit together, trying to go around the edge of the grade, and we went over the edge. It was about eighty feet to the river. I think I got there first, but it's a question.

We hit a deep place which was plumb lucky for us. I went down and got a handful of rocks and am just coming up when somebody comes down to get me.

We went back to the bottom and then came back to the top. I blows the alkali water out of my nose and gazes into the features of the man who came down after me.

It was our sheriff—Scenery Sims. He ain't even got a squeak left. I throws him out on the bank and then looks across the pool at Magpie, who is setting on a rock, combing his mustache.

"Where—did this come from?" I asks, pointing at Scenery.

"Even as you and I," splutters Magpie, looking back towards the grade.

"He's after us, I reckon."

Just then a bullet hit the water beside Magpie and another whines off a rock beside me. I lopes off down the river to a riffle where I splashes across and joins Magpie.

"Where's our broncs?" I asks.

"Gone hence, Ike. Don't reckon they even got scratched. Let's get a-goin'."

"If I ever get my hands on that —— fool on that gray mule—" says I.

"Self-preservation first, Ike. Somebody must 'a' knowed about that hold-up. Dang these high boots full of water!"

"Next time I monkeys with heroes, Magpie——"

"Aw, forget Reginald. I hope Scenery didn't suffer any bad effects. Did he wake up enough to recognize us?"

"If you 'a' let me tie a can on that —— mule in the first place——"

"Live and learn, Ike."

"Not with you, Magpie—learn and die."

It takes us two hours to get to our cabin. We hobbles inside and sets down on the bunk where we sets and lets our feet dangle.

"The danged thing didn't come home, I

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reckon," observes Magpie. "Maybe the mule killed him."

"Walking always did bring sweet thoughts to your lips, Magpie," says I.

"I'm going down-town," says Magpie. "I'm going to get me a big drink of——"

Just then the door opens and Scenery and Mike Pelly comes in. Scenery is sort of wet and moldy-looking, and his face looks like somebody had caressed him with a curry-comb. He looks at us and squeaks—

"Maybe you are innocent and can prove it, but I've got to do my duty."

"Provin' innocence is a tiresome chore," opines Magpie and throws down on the both of 'em with his six-shooter.

"Unhook their guns and hog-tie 'em, Ike."

"My suspicions are not unfounded," squeaks Scenery. "You're going to be worried for a long time over this day's work. Anything you say or do can be used against yuh. If you'll give up the five thousand you stole and promise to——"

"It is not for the sheriff to coerce a criminal," states a voice, and there stands Judge Steele, peering over his glasses at us. "I hereby adjudicates——"

"Set down, judge!" snaps Magpie, and the judge takes one look at that .45 and obeys. Then I hog-ties the presiding judge of Yaller Rock County.

"When I sets in judgment on you two, I will remember this," says he.

"Tell it to the jury," grins Magpie, and then we went outside.

"Canada or Mexico?" I asks.

"For murder, Ike. I'm going to kill a hero."

WE WENT down to Buck's place and finds that Art Wheeler is the center of attraction. I tries to back Magpie out of there, but Art sees us and yells:

"Who-ee! You ought to 'a' seen it, Magpie. Seven of 'em with Winchesters. Four .45-70's and three .30-30's lined up on me. I kicked an empty express box off among 'em, slammed the rawhide into my four broncs and saved the day."

"Huh!" grunts Magpie. "Say yuh did? What day, Art?"

"Today. Down at Wind River crossin'. By grab, I showed them bad men a trick or two. Five .45-90's and two——"

"Recognize any of them?" I asks.

"Not exactly, but I think the leader was "Black" Anderson, Ike. 'Course he had a mask on, but he had a big black beard and would weigh over two hundred. All of 'em had two six-guns and every one had a rifle. Three .40-82's and——"

"Changed guns real often," observes "Slim" Hawkins. "Wonder they didn't shoot at yuh, Art."

"Didn't they? Say, you betcha they did. I'm foggin' along Calamity when all to once I seen that they was gainin' fast, so I uses my head. I hooks a front wheel around a boulder, which throws one of my leaders off its feet, and I just blocked that road complete.

"When them bandits comes whoopin' up the road and around that curve, they sees that they can't stop and they can't go around me; so they just simply flew off that grade. Honest to gosh, I——"

"Hol' on, Art," cautions Buck. "You ain't speakin' of hummin'-birds."

"Flew!" snaps Art, floppin' his arms, so there won't be no mistake about it. "Flew right off. I says to myself, 'Ah-ha!' just like that, and then the eighth one flew off, and——"

"Stop and count again," interrupts Pete Gonyer.

"Lemme make my statement, can't yuh?" wails Art. "That eighth one was Scenery Sims. He went right after 'em. Mike Pelly was with Scenery, but Mike's bronc went lame on him and wasn't going so fast, so he stayed on the grade."

"Did Scenery get any of them?" I asks.

"Never seen 'em after they flew. Scenery says he dived plumb to the bottom of Wind River, but there wasn't any of them down there. Says he's got a clue, though."

"How did Scenery happen along?" asks Magpie.

"He was chasin' 'em," explains Art. "Chased 'em from Paradise. Well, sir, when I looks into the muzzles of them five .50-110's and them two .45-60's, I says to myself, 'I've got to use mighty good judgment right now, 'cause if them guns go off I'm going to be downhearted for quite a while.' Them .30-30's sure do tear——"

Magpie led me outside, where we stares at each other. "What kind of a plea are you going to make?" I asks.

"Lapse of memory or insanity, Ike. Five thousand! And Scenery chased us all the way from Paradise—all seven of us. Look who's comin'."

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It's a buckboard, and in it is Jay Bird Whittaker and "Perfume" Parsons, his cashier. They stops in front of the saloon and the crowd comes out. Of course, everybody tries to talk at the same time, but after while we hears Perfume say:

"Well, that kinda tallies with what happened to me, only I never seen but three. The others likely was guardin' the outside. Winchesters? Sure. The one what done the talkin' had a awful big six-shooter."

"Five thousand," we hears Jay Bird say, and then me and Magpie wanders zway.

"The thick plottens," says Magpie, foolish-like. "Next thing we'll be hearin' of somebody what got hung for committing suicide. We will now go to the jail."

"What for?"

"I want to see if our hero is still at large."

He wasn't in the jail; but on top of the sheriff's desk is an old sombrero and in the sweat-band is the initials—I. H.

"Our hero lost his helmet," says Magpie. "Here's where Scenery Sims loses his clue." And he puts the hat inside his vest.

We starts for the door, but turns right around and starts back again. Scenery, Mike and the judge are almost to the door. There ain't no way out except right into their arms, so we steps inside a cell, pulls the door shut and sets down by the wall.

"You couldn't hog-tie a dead-ex wagon with a loggin'-chain and a padlock," says Magpie, mean-like.

"I'd like to know how in—— they got loose," says I.

"Be a lot of satisfaction," whispers Magpie, and then they comes in.

"Well," says the judge, "we'll set the machinery of the law into motion at once. Them criminals has got to face the bar of justice and I'll see that they gets plenty of it. Heroic measures must be dealt with."

"I'll get 'em;" squeaks Scenery. "All seven of 'em. They sure are desperate and unmindful of the law when they holds up a bank and then holds up a stage while makin' their getaway. I didn't think it of Magpie and Ike, but I know they ain't got no morals."

"Crooks from their belts both ways!" snorts Mike.

"Organize a posse at once," orders the judge, and the three of 'em goes outside, talking about it.

"Narrow escape, Ike," grins Magpie, sneaking over to the door, "We sure was in a tight—uh——"

"Yes," says I. "Tight and narrow. You danged fool, you knowed them doors lock when they shut tight."

Magpie walks over and peers through the barred window. Pretty soon he says:

"Holee henhawks! Look who's here, Ike."

I goes over and peers out of the window at Reginald and his mule. Reginald looks like he had been curried with a handful of jack-knives, and the mule looks as meek as milk.

"Hey!" yells Magpie, and Reginald looks up. "Move over closer, you locoed, doubled-crossin' jug-head!"

Reginald yanks hard on one rein, pulls the mule's head plumb around to the fender of the saddle, and the mule ambles over sort of sideways.

"Wouldst talk with thee, hero," says Magpie.

"Yes'm," says Reginald. "Present."

"We're in jail," says Magpie. "On your account, you misguided mud-turtle. Know what I mean?"

"Oh," says Reginald. "I didn't recognize you before. Glad to see you. In jail? Can't get out?"

"Oh yes," says Magpie, sweet-like. "We can get out when the sheriff unlocks the door."

"Is that the only way?"

"Well, I helped build this jail, and I feel that if you was to shoot about ten pounds of dynamite in the proper place it might dent the wall. How are you, hero?"

"I'm fine, re'lly. The mule ran into one of those wire fences—the kind with the little thorns on. I've got some good news for you, Mister Simpkins."

"Good news!" grunts Magpie. "Go ahead—shoot."

"I can't shoot because I lost my gun. I think it was when we went into the wire thorns."

"Where's Violet?" I asks.

"Violet? Oh, yes, I forgot to tell you about her. Her folks caught her in Philadelphia."

"Is that the good news?" asks Magpie.

"Oh no. I just wanted to tell you that you were right."

Just then the mule lifts its head and starts ahead. Our hero just sets there and rides away.

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"Just wanted to tell me I was right," says Magpie.

"My——!"

"It may be good news, but nobody'd believe it," says I.

We keeps watch out of that window until dark, but don't see anybody. Seems like everybody has joined the posse.

We're almost asleep when we hears a noise. We hears Scenery's voice and then hears Reginald say—

"Re'lly, I do not wish to be incarcerated."

"I don't give a dang!" squeaks Scenery. "You're mebbe innocent, but you're actin' suspicious around here like a burglar. *Sabe?* Into jail you go."

We hears him unlock the door and we hugs the corner of the cell. Comes a scuffle, Scenery squeaks out a cuss-word, and then comes a *click!*

"Now, dang your pink hide!" wailed Scenery. "You've done it—you have! And the key is on the outside where I can't reach it!"

"I must get out," says Reginald. "Re'lly I must, don't you see?"

"*Aw-w-w-w*—!" squeals Scenery. "Locked in my own jail! Dang you!"

"It can't last much longer," quavers Reginald. "Re'lly it can't."

"The —— it can't!" snaps Scenery. "It'll have to last until morning. No——"

"But it can't!" wails Reginald. "No one has any power over it, re'lly."

"You're loco," argues Scenery. "I won't talk with you."

"But don't you see," pleads Reginald. "It can not last. Don't you see that? I wonder that any one can be so ignorant of——"

I WON'T use any word to describe what follows. If you can imagine one vast eclipse of everything worth a dang, a wind blowing a million miles an hour, the biggest noise ever made—well, you've got a slight idea of the importance of what happened right then.

We're inside that jail cell, all dark-like, and in the next instant I saw the moon. Yessir, I looks right up at the old moon. I seen some stars around the moon and then there's sort of a veil drawn over everything and then I sees a lot more stars.

These last ain't what "Comet" Custer used to call "fixed planets," 'cause they're sort of agitated, running into each other and making little puffs of smoke when they collides. I says to myself—

"Don't be surprized at anything you see, Ike, 'cause they say this Western country is changing every day."

Then I seems to be setting down under a tree in the moonlight. Everything is peaceful. I looks up above me and I sees the granddaddy of all buzzards setting on a limb, humped up, looking down at me. Ordinarily I tolerates a buzzard, but this one is a "specimen," so I reaches down for my gun. Then I looks up at the buzzard and shakes my head.

The gun ain't in the holster, 'cause there ain't no belt to carry a holster; also and moreover there ain't no pants over which to wear the belt. I says—

"I'm dreaming that I'm out in the open without any clothes on."

"*Yer-r-r-ack!*" says the buzzard.

Comes a ripping sound and something lands right on my neck. I seen a Roaming candle and a couple of pin-wheels and then I wriggled loose.

"*Juz-z-erflookuffuff,*" says the buzzard.

"Magpie," says I, "you've caught a bad cold. You've been in a draft."

He seems to crane his neck a few times and then spits audible-like.

"I don't know what I had in my throat," says he, "but I think it was the key to the jail. What in —— happened, Ike?"

"I ought to know, hadn't I?" I asks. "Somebody told me, didn't they?"

"Look!" croaks Magpie. "Big dog."

It comes along towards us, coming slow.

"Danged big dog," wheezes Magpie. "Get out, Nero!" and he throws a rock at it. We heard the rock hit it, and then the dog stops and to our ears comes—

"Now—now, I've withstood too much—re'lly."

"Reginald!" gasps Magpie. "I'd forgot you."

"I—I don't mind," wails Reginald. "Re'lly I don't."

"Where's the sheriff?" I asks, and Reginald seems to take it under advisement.

"I don't know, re'lly. We were together quite a while and then I seen him get on my mule and then—I don't know, re'lly. I tried to make him understand about that dynamite, but——"

"Dynamite?" croaks Magpie. "It was dynamite."

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"So it said on the box in your cabin. I took all there was because I had no scales to weigh out ten pounds and——"

"Forty pounds if there was an ounce!" groans Magpie.

"Go on—uh—hero."

"I just lit the what-you-call-it when I became arrested and——"

"I heard the rest," sighs Magpie. "But what I want to know is this: why in —— didn't you come and tell us that Violet never came? You knew danged well we were going to hold up that stage."

"Oh, yes, that's right," agrees Reginald. "I re'lly must have forgotten. You see I was deeply interested in your argument, and I forgot. You were right."

"Right about what?"

"Holding up a bank with a—er—monkey-wrench."

"How do you know?" I asks.

"Because I did it," says Reginald. "I proved the theory. I'm a wonder."

There ain't a word said for a long time and then Magpie says:

"Yes, you're a wonder. There ain't the least doubt about it. You'll get about twelve years in the penitentiary. How much money did you get?"

"Quite a lot, re'lly," says Reginald, shaky-like. "I filled both saddle-bags."

"My——!" grunts Magpie. "Five men with Winchesters! We've got to save him, Ike, and thereby save ourselves. What did you do with it, Reginald?"

"Threw it away."

"Threw it away? Holee henhawks! Where?"

Reginald thinks for quite a while, and then, "Do you know where the road crosses that muddy place where that funny bridge is?"

"Moose Swamp," says I. "Corduroy road."

"I threw it in there," says Reginald. "I was in a hurry."

"Oh you —— fool," groans Magpie. "You poor ——, let's go. We've got to find it, Ike. Come on, Reginald, you pie-headed, brainless—uh—hero."

Just then we hears voices. I reckon that everybody who didn't go with that posse is on their way down to see what the big noise was. We hears Scenery's voice squeak like the E-string of a fiddle:

"How do I know? I arrested that pro-te-jay of Magpie's and he yanked the door shut on both of us, and then the jail rose up and left us. I don't know a thing until I wakes up and finds myself ridin' that mule."

"Come on," says Magpie, and the three of us limps around to the main street. There's one animal at the hitch-rack—Reginald's mule.

Magpie yanks the saddle off and throws it on the sidewalk.

"Climb on," says he. "Nothin' dainty about this here equipage; but maybe the three of us can hold down this long-legged son-of-a-gun."

WE PUT Reginald between us and started out of town. Hold him down? Say, that big hammer-headed mule needed about half a ton to make him travel smooth. We went down that road like a runaway locomotive.

We went through Pete Gonyer's back-yard and when we hit the road again we've got forty feet of clothes-line, two suits of underclothes, a pair of overalls and several socks.

"Guide the danged thing!" I yelps, trying to get the rope from under my nose.

"What with?" howls Magpie. "Who took the bridle off?"

"I did," admits Reginald. "I knew how to do that much."

On we went down that dim road, lickety-brindle, high and handsome.

"Ho-o-o-ld fast!" yells Magpie, and we went across the river so fast that the mule likely never even got his feet wet.

It's only a mile more to Moose Swamp.

"How—are—we—going—to—get—off?" yells Magpie.

"That is easy, re'lly," chokes Reginald. "If it isn't, I'm a wonder."

"Got any laundry left?" I yelps.

"The overalls."

"Throw it over his head," I advises. "Blind the danged thing, Magpie, and he'll slow up."

I feels Reginald go forward, so I know Magpie must be trying my scheme; and then Reginald straightens up. Did the mule slow up? Yeah, like Kelly did.

"Wow!" yelps Magpie; and just then I feels the rear end of that mule rise up and I turns a flip-flop with our hero in my arms.

Comes a splash and a glob and I skids into a tree with my ears, eyes and mouth

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full of mud. Pretty soon I hears Magpie's voice weak-like and kinda gooie:

"Blind mule missed the bridge! Wonder if anybody's alive?"

"I ain't," says I. "But I can't answer for Reginald and the other mule."

"I—I would be all right if somebody would take the mule off my lap," wails Reginald. "Re'lly, I would. He has his feet in my lap and I can't put the bridle over his head."

"Bub-bridle?" croaks Magpie. "You've got the bridle?"

"Yu-yes. I th-thought we might need it."

We led the mule out of the mud and then we managed to get Reginald on to the bank. Magpie lit a match and looked at us, but made no remarks.

"Now, where did you throw it?" asks Magpie.

"I think I can show you," says Reginald, weak-like.

We tore our way through the brush and got back to the road, where we lit matches and let Reginald hunt for the vital spot.

"Right about there," says he, pointing off into the swamp. "I think that is the place, re'lly."

"You're a —— of a robber!" groans Magpie. "Well, I reckon we've got to find it, Ike."

The mud was above our knees, but we didn't mind it. We got out in that goo and dug deep. Mosquitoes bit us every place possible and being as we're about seven-eighths out of clothes there is plenty of possibilities.

I've got so many sore spots that I'm just one big ache and I can hear Magpie creak every time he stoops over. I lifted up enough mud with my two hands to build a real nice swamp, but all I ever got between my fingers was mud.

We played mud-hen for about an hour, without any luck a-tall. Somebody wrote once about a "gibbous moon." That was the kind that shone down upon us. Two gaunt, ragged ghouls, flapping and digging in oozy slime, while on the bank stands two blots, one of which has got long ears.

After while I hears Magpie say:

"—— the mud and everything else!" and he goes glob-globbing to the bank and crawls out.

"Get on that mule and point towards the North Star," I hears him say to Reginald. And then he adds, "I hope you hit the North Pole and freeze your feet."

Reginald don't say a word. I see him get on the mule.

"Just about where is that money you stole?" asks Magpie.

"In—in the saddle-bags," quavers Reginald.

Splat!

Magpie slapped that mule with his hat and it fades off down the road, just hitting here and there. I crawls out.

"The money in the saddle-bags?" I asks. "Why—uh——"

"Uh-huh," says Magpie, soft-like. "Feel of this, Ike."

He hands me a slippery, muddy object, and I runs my fingers over it.

It was a monkey-wrench.

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A GOOD SWORD and A GOOD HORSE

By Gordon MacCreagh

Author of "Contraband," "The Brass Idol," etc.

SIMON'S! At last! After two years!

Enthralling years of hardship, of danger, and—*grâce Dieu*—of all the varied chances of fortune which meet a man of good spirit who campaigns in Flanders. Though for my part I was never able to see what we of the League were ever fighting these pestilent Huguenots for, from whom we could never win aught but blows. What difference does it make, say I, whether one prays with a string of beads or without; though in these parlous times one who is wise thinks such thoughts to himself rather than speaks them aloud.

But what matter the reasons of state of our ministers? One goes to war because of the gay life of the campaign; because of the call of a keen sword, a stout comrade, and a good horse; and—to mend one's fortunes. When a man is five-and-twenty and God has given him health he does not harbor the hate that kills just because another says his prayers in another manner.

As for me, I have found some good lads among these heretical fighters for "The Cause," gentlemen of parts, quick with the sword and gamblers of the finest; as witness myself, here again in Simon's in no better case then on that unbelievable night when D'Armand threw the eighteen six times in succession and won from me the last shred of my patrimony.

Worse, in fact; for then I had at least a suit of clothes befitting my station which that rogue Maurice had charged me as if the silver braiding had been set with brilliants, and which D'Armand saved for me by the bold expedient of refusing to gamble any further; for in my madness I would have wagered all I possessed and—so spitefully did my luck run—I would have stood a plucked crow for the derision of all, like the young Comte du Charny, who went home naked through the streets surrounded by a cordon of his friends.

Hélas donc, how the events change! I would have fought with D'Armand that night, for I was mad and that hot Spanish wine had inflamed my brain, but he had the courage to refuse, and he was right. I was a fool, a boy with the hot-headed notions of one who had seen naught of men other than the simpering fops of the court and the gay blades of the gaming-houses.

And today—D'Armand, with all his luck, lay at Privennes, where an arquebus ball had found him. And I, while my doublet was no longer of velvet and the silver cap to my scabbard had long since been wrenched off, showing a good span of the gray steel, I at least stood once again in Simon's, having in exchange for the trumperies of dress a considerable experience of men and a more than considerable of the sword. And my heart was light within me, for having now nothing to lose, I had not a care in the world; and, *dâme*, as that splendid old heretic, the Admiral of Coligny, used to say—

"A good sword and a good horse, and the world is a capon pasty for him who dares."

Behold me, then, in Simon's, all prepared for whatever pasty Fortune might serve. I was a trifle disappointed, it is true, that none had recognized me with the shout of

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welcome that had been my portion in the old days; none, that is to say, except that huge oaf, Garcier, who still held his position by the door. He indeed had bowed low and had murmured with his half-wit grin as if two years were but yesterday:

"And what table does it please the Sieur de Dorson to play at? Let me but know and I will sweep this *bourgeois* rabble from it."

He was the only one, and I gave the good fellow a louis in my gratitude, though it was ill I could spare it, and slipped in like any unknown. But the old gaming-house was not what it had been. The Guise held Paris, and the gallants of the court had given place to a less gay and more sinister set, hangers-on of "Our Great Man," leaguers, who diced and swore weird oaths and ruffled it in a brave imitation of their betters; but the *savoir faire* of breeding was not there.

The place was less clean too; and I noticed that the smoky old portrait of mine host over the mantel, done with such marvelous skill by Frontenay when he was drunk, had been slashed across by a wild sword in some riotous encounter.

In the place of the old crowds the familiar place seemed empty to me. Scarce a score of men sat at the tables, yet they made noise enough for thrice their number. Altogether the atmosphere was offensive to me, who had looked forward to a joyous homecoming. My disappointment was poignant; this was not Paris as I had known it.

Yet, so strange is habit, that I was about to approach one of the less unseemly strangers and invite him to throw a main or two with me—for the army had taught me to be democratic—when I became aware of something afoot. Something that showed no overt sign yet, only the intangible air which a soldier becomes so keen to detect. I stayed to watch.

A GROUP of overdressed gentlemen of the new *bourgeoisie* shouted over their play and jostled one another at the long table before the fireplace. At the farther end sat one who, it was easy to discern, was not of their party—nor of their kind for that matter. At that distance from the candles I could not see much of him, but what was visible was of sufficient interest.

The shadowed profile showed an immobile face of coldness, yet of a pleasing strength. The hair was clipped short according to the new fashion. The figure seemed to be vigorous and the clothing of an unobtrusive quietness; yet there was that in his manner which made it clear that he was no person of the common people.

He sipped his wine and watched the gamesters with an emotionless disinterest which was almost an insult. Thunder of God, a bold cockerel, this, to flout thus carelessly so ill-favored a party! Other players had withdrawn themselves discreetly to the lesser tables, and called the main with unobtrusive quietness. And then a slow movement of the stranger's attracted my eye to a glint of a reflected candle from below the table and my heart went out to him at once.

Here was coincidence! A stranger, like myself; young and seeming vigorous, like myself; a gentleman, like myself; and—discovery of the most unfortunate pleasantness—in circumstances, like myself, which compelled him to carry a scabbard so well-worn that the point of a long sword stared insolently from the end.

In the same moment I became aware that the something which was afoot had to do with this stranger of the cool manner. Whether he was aware of it too I could not tell. He sat all unperturbed at his end of the table and sipped his wine with an ease that was remarkable; yet I noticed that, unconsciously perhaps, the pommel of his sword moved itself forward by small degrees till it rested on his thigh while the flickering point lay clear of the table-leg.

This drama absorbed me. Of the revelers, one was clearly the leader. I could see that he wore the mauve cockade of Mayenne; and it was evident that the power of his patron gave him sense of authority. A handsome fellow enough, who carried himself with a certain air; one of superior mold to his fellows and of a certain corresponding aloofness. Yet to me it seemed that this was an imitation of some great personage rather than an expression of himself. He flicked back the ruffles at his wrists and, leaning forward over the board on his elbows, he spoke with an affectation of derision to one of his pot companions, a tall fellow with a purple scar across the cheekbone, looking with ill-concealed offense at the stranger the while.

The fellow leered in understanding; and presently he rose with a prodigious yawn

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of studied carelessness and swaggered to the end of the table where the stranger sat alone. Doubtless he expected to evoke a certain alarm by his manner, or at least an interest. But the stranger moved not a jot; he noticed the intrusion only with the somber regard of his eyes; at which the abashment of the other was to me most laughable. But the fellow recovered his composure with an air of braggadocio.

"*Monsieur*," he bowed in extravagant imitation of a gentleman, "I crave *monsieur's* pardon; our little party is not so little that the table accommodates us in comfort; it will be convenient if *monsieur* will condescend to remove himself to another."

The words were polite enough, for a fellow of his breeding, but there was an insolence in the tone and in the manner of this bravo which was unmistakable. I waited with interest to see what my stranger of the wooden face would say.

For a long while he said nothing. For the space of a long breath perhaps his gaze rested on the wall behind the other's back; then a belated though faint interest came into his eyes and he spoke with a slow languidness.

"*Mos-siou*," he said in an even monotone, and from his accent it was immediately clear that he was some foreigner, "I regret, but to move would be to me most inconvenient."

The tall fellow of the scar started back with a gasp and an air so ludicrous that I for one was unable to restrain a shout of that ill-timed mirth that has brought trouble upon me on more than one occasion. His companions who had been watching covertly turned to favor me with surprized scowls and the man himself bared his teeth in an ugly grin.

Less than all men can a bully afford to be laughed at when his very position among his fellows rests upon his faculty of intimidation. The bravo snarled then, once at me over his shoulder, and turned to the immobile stranger, his hand upon his sword-hilt.

"*Monsieur l'étranger* does not understand," he grated with menace. "Permit me to make my desire clear. It is my wish that——"

"But perfectly," interrupted the stranger without raising his voice from its even drawl. "I understand very well that a hired bravo intends to frighten me."

"*Ss-sapp-perl!*" The hiss of the oath was accentuated by the rasp of the ready sword; and to me, who had seen much of men in two years, it was clear that death was in the enraged ruffian's arm. My heart stopped, for it had gone out to this foolhardy stranger and his disadvantage, sitting as he was and with his sword not even to his hand, was pitiful. Almost was I tempted to spring to his aid; but it was already too late. How could I traverse that room hampered with tables before the bully lunged?

And then—with the speed of light it happened—for the first time this stranger, who had the appearance of sluggishness, moved like a serpent. In some miraculous manner his hand found his sword-hilt. Without any attempt to draw I saw the gleam of the bare point as it flashed up in an arc and he thrust low, scabbard and all, like a striking adder from where he sat. In the groin it took the tall bully, a good span of bare gray steel.

For a moment he lurched, and the expression on his face that would be so fierce was of amaze as at a sudden miracle. Then slowly the strength went from his knees; the sword fell from his relaxed fingers clattering upon the floor of bricks, and in the next instant he crumpled down upon it, groaning and swearing horribly.

The stranger cast hardly a look at him; there was nothing more to fear on that score. While the fellow's companions still stared in amaze he rose with deliberation and swept his weapon clear and stood to face them, crouching in an attitude which to me seemed to be no position for swordplay but which presaged an astounding alertness of movement.

THEN for the first time the light shone clearly upon his face and I was able to look at my stranger of the astonishing deceptiveness. A youth he was, a young man no older than myself and of my own height; broader in the shoulder perhaps and browner in the face, a trifle longer in the sword-arm too, I judged, to which a weapon which seemed almost too long for a good balance gave a prodigious reach.

But the face. The close-cropped hair was as ruddy as any young fox's; like a dash of pale wine the straight brows stood out against the brown skin; and the eyes beneath

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that had been so coldly somber veritably smiled now as he waited for the bravo's fellows to attack him.

Nor did they keep him waiting. Their startled wits gathered, they rushed upon him with fury of oaths. Again like a serpent he moved. The long sword flickered out and pinked the foremost prettily in the shoulder; and then he stepped swiftly to where a stout table on either side would hamper the rest in coming at him. They came readily enough, though their leader held haughtily aloof.

"Make it swift, fellows," he directed as if ordering the slaughter of a sheep.

But that sword of amazing length flickering at their throats was no inducement to recklessness. But two could engage him with comfort, while the others pressed behind, waiting for a chance for a sly thrust. The serving-wenches, attracted by the uproar, clustered at the far door ready to shriek, as is the wont of their kind, at each letting of blood. The half-wit Garcier mowed and gibbered at the entrance. The other gamesters drew back to the wall and watched in silence.

"Make an end, fools," called the leader harshly. "What ails you that one man makes a play for so long?"

But they only shouted the louder in the face of that menacing reach, while the tall stranger showed his teeth in a silent laugh. Then one of those who pressed behind conceived the idea to drag aside one of the heavy tables and so open a way. The stranger's lips snapped suddenly tight over his smile as he disengaged with a sharp *dérobement* from the more agile of his opponents and turned his blade in a swift arc to thrust at this new menace. At the same moment a treacherous point shooting from under the other's arm reached his left breast.

Again my heart stopped, for *dâme*, this foreigner was a man after my own heart. But by the grace of God 'twas no more than a graze. The long arm never faltered in a swift riposte that barely fell short of ramming his triumphant shout down the throat of the foremost attacker.

Yet five against one were dastardly odds for a soldier to stand by and watch. *T'nerre d'Dieu*, it was too much for blood to stand. With a shout of, "Courage, my brave friend," I swept my own weapon clear; and there in the next instant was I engaged once more, in spite of all my good resolutions, in a quarrel which was none of my own.

But that made matters different. I disposed of the lout who would have dragged aside the table with a high parry in quarte to his savage thrust and a cut over, ever a favorite stroke of mine and effectual against an indifferent swordsman, as indeed were they all.

The others, menaced now from the side, faltered, thereby giving my tall friend an opportunity to press his attack. He found time to flash a smile of his white teeth at me and—

"*Mordiou*," he cried, as a lad playing at ball, "this becomes a game."

It was true. The four remaining fellows fell back before our blades in demoralization. As for me, I was constrained to laugh with my ally; this taming of would-be bravos was rare sport. But a sharp order came from the leader; he of the mauve cockade. He was drawing his own sword with an air of finality.

"Enough, fellows! Let be and stand aside!" he commanded. "I will settle with this gentleman myself."

The men fell back sullenly, though gladly enough.

I looked to my position for this new antagonist; but it was the stranger whom he proposed to honor. *Ma foi*, he was brave enough, this follower of the Mayenne, in view of that long sword and the sinewy arm behind it. Yet doubtless he fancied himself as a swordsman, in which case of course the advantage of reach might well be offset by skill.

But such considerations found no place in my crazy foreigner's mind. He but nodded his head to me, indicating the four fellows, and advanced from his position between the tables to the encounter with a smile half of amusement, half of ferocity, for the magic of good steel was upon him. I understood his nodded direction well enough and took up a position to guard against any treachery from our late antagonists and to watch what gave promise of a rare set-to.

Yet I was due for a disappointment. From the first biting of the two blades it was clear that this leader was a master of fence. Form and position were perfect, and he handled his weapon with a confidence as if he but played with the buttons. My stranger on the other hand maintained that

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awkward-appearing crouch which would have made any orthodox master weep in despair. The other smiled in thin scorn as he crossed blades.

Yet, as I have said, I was disappointed. In three passes it was over. While the gentleman of Mayenne still felt out his opponent's blade—for he held a certain respect for its recent performance in spite of the clumsy attitude—the stranger seized upon the startling aggressive and—consider a moment this for sword-play—with the first binding of blades he forced the engagement into sixte and immediately with that phenomenal speed of his executed a rasping *flançonnade* and lunged like a lightning-stroke in septime.

Sainte Marie, but my hair crawled! Never had I seen this most reckless of assaults against any but a left-handed player; only in its unimaginable speed could lie the scant margin of safety for the attacker and its chance of success; yet so sudden and swift was the move that the Mayennard saved himself by a thin hair's breadth, displaying indeed the hand of a past-master; yet at that the long blade cut the lacing of his baldric. And then once again my heart ceased, for the opening left was deplorable.

With a triumphant shout of "*Tiens, ça va!*" and a ferocious snap of the teeth the Mayennard lunged savagely at my stranger's wide-open chest. I ceased to breathe. Almost I closed my eyes against this ending. Yet the instant rasp of opposing blades smote my ear. In the twinkling of an eyelash I saw the long blade disengage from the severed straps and whirl up in a strong parry in quarte and then—phenomenon—it wound round the other blade and over, gripping it like a live hand, rasping down the entire length and twisting powerfully away to the right.

Sang d'Dieu, but never have I seen such a disarmament! It was like wrenching a sword from a fractious child and throwing it far away out of harm's reach. There stood *monsieur* the grand duelist holding on to a sprained wrist and looking bewildered even before his weapon ceased to whirl and struck the far wall where it lodged itself securely upon a broken sconce.

MY ASTONISHING stranger drew back and lowered his point. For my part I menaced the four fellows of the discomfited Mayennard; but they showed no stomach for further argument. It was the stranger who first recovered his *sang-froid* and took charge of the situation. Lifting himself backward on to a table and swinging his heels cheerfully while his sword-point trailed on the ground, he bowed awkwardly and said to the still marveling antagonist with that execrable accent of his:

"*Mossiou* will doubtless see the propriety of withdrawing with his attendants. His sword will, with his permission, remain in the keeping of mine host till we have departed."

It was then that the other recovered his mazed senses and swore such an array of oaths as I have never heard even in the camps. By the good Lord and by all the holy saints and by all the devils he cursed the day and the place and his poltroon followers and his conqueror and his ill luck the while he beat the air with his empty fists and swore that never again could the stranger play such a trick of fence upon him. Almost he seemed to demand, in fact, that he be granted a resumption of the fight, insisting that ill luck alone had discomfited him.

But—

"Aha," laughed the stranger happily. "Just so, *Mossiou;* for that very reason I prefer *Mossiou's* sword remain perched up on the wall."

And that was final. With a gay humor that was impervious to the other's ravings he insisted that they leave us in peace; and together we herded them with their wounded to the door and thus out. Then at the last it was possible to take stock of one another. Long my companion in arms looked at me with the somber introspection in his eyes of an infant's blue. Then—

"I think it is befitting, *Mossiou*, that we crack a flagon together."

Right gladly I fell in with the proposal, for I foresaw in this acquaintance much that might tend to mutual pleasure and advancement. Already I loved him as a brother for his stout swordsmanship and for the joyous recklessness with which he rose to meet whatever exigency the turn of fortune's wheel might place in his path; though he for his part had the accursed reserve of his race, and it was many a long day thereafter before I was assured of his regard.

A half-frightened serving-wench brought

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wine to my call, wherewith my friend immediately abashed me, toasting me warmly for my timely aid and ascribing to me a credit which was in truth beyond my due. Thereafter I drew from him in littles and tittles—for he was of an extraordinary reticence—his tale. *Peste*, what an examination! Why, one of my own countrymen would have imparted to me in the same circumstances the whole of his life history over the first bottle.

But this was an Englishman. *Voila*, that explains all. Or at least, he was not exactly an Englishman, he said, though, *ma foi*, I could not see his distinction. He was a younger son of the house of Trevor, and having therefore according to their extraordinary law no patrimony, he had sailed with a famous sea-captain, Raleigh, he called him, to wrest a fortune in the Indies from the Dons, with whom they were *not* at war. Truly an amazing people!

Having won naught other than experience, he sailed again with another roving captain who set forth with many other madmen and their families with the avowed purpose of forsaking their country forever and founding a colony in those same Indies. Virginia, they called it; and here at last my expatriate found his tongue. Of this Virginia and its wonders he raved to extinction.

His whole ambition and loyalty and endeavor were to the end that he might return thither and live his life there. Wherefore, he explained, he was a "colonist" and his country was this remote place of red savages. His presence here was accounted for by some matter of an estate on his mother's side, which had long since, he found, been gobbled up by the contending parties of Guise and Henry.

It was therefore incumbent upon him to acquire by some other means an equivalent fund to take away and devote to his precious Virginia. *Crê-nom*, but what an ambition of insanity! In the meanwhile, *morbleu*, here we were, two young men with our swords sticking out of our sheaths and with the imperative need of accumulating a fortune, or in lieu thereof at least a few crowns.

He looked at me and I at him. I could see that he was considering my condition of dress, as indeed I was his. Our eyes, traveling up from dusty high boots to plain hose and trunks and serviceable doublet, met and we both laughed. Then this Trevor with a whimsical pursing of the lips and a raising of the eyebrows, which was a trick of his, drew forth a wallet and shook from it on to the table a few gold coins and some silver.

"*V'la*, there it is," he said. "I have some three and a half crowns, nearly four, in fact, to contribute to the common fund."

Tiens, what a rare intuition! Never had I met one to whom my heart had so been drawn, one with whom I would more willingly have joined fortunes. I sprang from my seat and embraced him, whereat he displayed all the discomfiture of any girl.

"And I," I cried, "have nearly five crowns. Courage my friend; when one has a good sword and a good horse the world is a capon pasty for him who dares."

"*M-hm*, true," he remarked with that dry smile of his. "All that we lack is the good horse."

Whereat we both laughed again, uproariously and without cause; for we were full of light-heartedness. *Dâme*, when one is twenty-five and has a friend the world is a good place to look upon.

Thus was our pact concluded, without form or ceremony or even the clasp of the hand; yet I knew that I could trust this friend to the end. It was at this juncture, while we pledged each other over the rims of our cups, that the strange episode befell.

ONE of those gamesters who had kept out of the fracas, a sober-looking fellow, some sort of clerk, I should judge by his apparel—so far had Simon's sunk at that time—rose with deliberation and passed close by our table, hesitating as if about to address us. I was on the point of demanding an explanation of this intrusion when he drew a folded slip of paper from under his jacket and, looking round with quick suspicion, dropped it upon the table and in the next instant was gone.

It was but a tiny square of a delicate yellow and from it a faint perfume of crushed roses and lavender pervaded the vicinity. Such a thing in itself was no marvel.

"For you," I laughed, for it had fallen near to his elbow. "An assignation from some rich *bourgeoise*, wife of some cloth merchant doubtless."

"But no," he replied seriously. "I know no one in Paris."

Peste, as if it were necessary to know

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anybody in order to receive an assignation in this Paris of ours. I was constrained to laugh again at his simplicity.

"*Bien alors*, let us open it together."

This we did, as full of curiosity as any two *demoiselles* at the convent of the Ursulines, wagering with one another as to the nature of the amatory message But blank disappointment was ours Nay though, I will not say disappointment; for the thing promised mystery, and we—well, the world and all time were before us.

Within the paper was rudely inscribed nothing more interesting than what appeared at first sight to be a map, and a map, forsooth, of no more than empty streets. We gazed upon it and at each other with blankness; of what use was a map to us? Yet presently methought I could see some sense in the aimless wandering.

"Observe, my friend," said I. "There is evidently a definite indication here; for the course proceeds from the rue de St. Jaques la Boucherie, in which is this Simon's, through devious turnings, all meticulously set down, to the rue de Tirchape, in which we find marked a cross and the number 26. Would it not seem then——"

"That it is an assignation after all?" concluded Trevor with his humorous lifting of the eyebrows.

"But no, my friend," I hastened to enlighten his ignorance. "Assignations do not come in this manner. It is my opinion rather that here is some person who plots, politically or otherwise and—is it not clear—a good sword or two?"

"*Hm.* Why then would the fellow not tell us a word in so simple a matter?"

"*Mordieu!* In such a place, my friend, and in these times? But you are simple; who knows where there may or may not be spies; who knows but that this may not be a matter of danger to the plotters?"

Trevor pinched together his lips and regarded for many minutes the wall with his somber gaze. Then suddenly, like a change in a mask, his teeth flashed and his gay laugh rang out.

"Ah well," he cried. "Since we have nothing to lose."

"And all to gain," I interposed.

The understanding was perfect; there was no need of discussion.

"Let us immediately set forth," we both cried together; and we laughed again immoderately, for the romance of the unknown adventure gripped us with its everlasting allure. Arm in arm, then, we marched from Simon's to meet whatever the turn of the wheel might bring.

IT WAS mid-evening already, and the streets were therefore given over to the denizens of the night; soldiery who lounged before the portals of their guard-houses; Guizards in the livery of one or other of the scions of the great family; and revelers, young blades who shouted in the wine-shops or roistered in the open squares, looking for a pretty face or for any excitement that deviltry might suggest.

Respectable tradesmen had long since retired behind the bars of their domiciles. Yet none molested us. Perhaps there was that in our appearance which implied naught to be gained but hard knocks. Suffice it that we arrived at our destination without adventure.

It was a somber enough place, this rue de Tirchape, narrow and but sparsely lighted by lamps swinging from iron chains which spanned the dark gap between the beetling houses, clearly a section that had known better, or rather, more fashionable days; though the buildings were solid and of a certain exclusiveness. The number 26 was dark and silent as any tomb. Almost we had looked for some expectation of our coming; but the blank silence was forbidding in its impression of secrecy.

"It would seem," I hazarded, "that our mysterious friend of the note omitted to give us some pass-word or other which would be necessary for entry."

"'Sblood," ejaculated Trevor. "Here is all the pass-word I need."

And he strode boldly to the door and seized upon a great knocker as large as a caldron and swung it down upon its knob with a sturdy crash which might well have awakened all the good folk in the street.

At this drastic treatment evidence of our being awaited was forthcoming almost before the hollow boom of the stroke had ceased to reverberate through the house. The great door swung noiselessly and a blank darkness of a none too prepossessing invitation yawned before us.

For my part, caution counseled hesitation; but this Trevor strode in for all the world as if he came to his own family-hall, and, *sangdieu*, who was I to linger? A ghostly touch at my sleeve guided me

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forward through a mazy passage as black as the pit. I had no conception of what my friend was thinking, but as for me, my sword hung loose to my hand. I liked not this business of slinking in the catacombs.

I was on the point of bracing my feet and demanding an explanation when there came the soft swish of heavy draperies and a tall pyramid of light cut its pattern on an opposing wall. In the next instant there we stood, blinking at each other like bats in what seemed to be a room of a thousand candles—though a second glance showed the radiance to be but the reflected light of mirrors—while a serving-man bowed and murmured that we should be pleased to be seated, and was immediately gone.

I looked about the chamber with a natural interest, noting at once that this was the residence of no wealthy tradesman. Trevor, on the other hand, with a methodical prudence which shamed me, strode immediately to the farther draperies which screened the windows.

"*Hm*, barred and shuttered," he announced coolly. "A pretty cage."

I came to his side to examine with him the possibilities of egress should necessity arise, when a voice broke from behind our backs.

"*Aha!* My young cockerels of the gaming-house! Your pardon, gentlemen, that I have kept you waiting; I had hardly expected you to leap upon such an adventure in the dark so soon."

There stood our clerk of the note, though I saw that I had misplaced him, more by reason of his mode of address than owing to any change in his appearance. A steward, I judged him now, of some great man's household; though at that I found him overly familiar, as indeed did my friend. We stood stiffly facing him; but his smile was ingratiating.

"*Messieurs* will be good enough to be seated," he invited. "While we discuss a small matter of business. To be brief. It is necessary that a—something of very great value, which the Guise would give much to hold, be spirited out of Paris to—a certain town not so far. For this purpose the services of two gentlemen of discretion and skill are needed. There will be perhaps some danger, which, I have had occasion to observe—" he bowed to us both— "is no deterrent to you. I am empowered, then, to ask whether you will consider the undertaking of this task."

As I had suspicioned from the outset the matter was one of the countless factional plottings of the day. It was a prospect alluring enough, yet disquieting by reason of his indefiniteness. It was the cool-headed Trevor who voiced my first thought before I had well conceived it in my own mind,

"*Hm.* This, er—'something' being of very great value, permit me to inquire, *mossiou*, how you come to select two strangers unknown to you?"

The steward smiled easily.

"Have I not said, *gentlemen?*"

I sprang from my seat.

"*Monsieur*," I bowed in acknowledgment.

"*Bien*, it is understood, then," he proceeded with briskness, though how he should know so readily that we would fall in with his adventure was a mystery to me. "Now, as for details. The place of your destination, will be three days' ride distant; the name—Morneaux, which town being, as you know, for The Cause." He looked at us very closely. "You will understand the need of discretion."

I bowed in acquiescence. What matter to me whether the affair was of the Huguenot Cause or of the League so long as it held promise of some enthralling venture.

"Now, as to this something of great value," I asked. "If *monsieur* will communicate just what it is and how it is to be conveyed we may plan the more readily."

AT THIS juncture there became apparent a small commotion upon the stairway without. A voice cajoling anxiously, entreating—

"But, *mademoiselle*, the gentlemen discuss their business; it is not seemly that——"

Which was interrupted by another of imperious self-will.

"But no, I don't care. If I am to travel with a pretty gentleman I must see him first. Make way. I will pass."

There was a stamp of a little foot, a squeal of delighted evasion, a swish of a silken petticoat, and in the next instant there burst into the room a vision.

Not more than eighteen I judged her, a figure of that rare beauty of a girl just budded into womanhood; a face of perfected oval, in which were set the reddest

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mouth, the most adorable nose, and the blackest eyes of an elfin mischievousness still sparkling from her recent triumph.

It must not be supposed that the full realization of all this panoply of charms came to me all at once. It was with further opportunity that I found time to dwell upon each separately. For the present I was all confounded by this so charming apparition. Yet I did not forget my manners; in an instant I was upon my feet, the plumes of my hat sweeping the floor.

"*Mademoiselle!*"

I bowed in the most approved manner of the court, while Trevor, I could see, had risen too and bent himself awkwardly in the middle, arms stiff and the face of a lugubrious seriousness; it was verily to laugh. Yet it was at the ruddy hair and the blue eyes of my friend that the radiant creature looked and found apparently nothing of humor in his stiffness.

The steward was standing with a wry smile.

"*Eh bien*, gentlemen," he shrugged. "Since it must now be clear to you what is this so valuable charge that you escort, permit me to present you to Mademoiselle la Comtesse de Mondeville."

Once again my plumes swept the floor.

"*Mademoiselle*, I have the honor. The Sieur Etienne Marie de Dorson."

I take credit that my manner was perfect. My friend for his part bent again at the belt-line.

"Mr. Trevor," he said simply.

Yet to my chagrin it must be admitted it was the brown face and the broad shoulder of my friend that held her gaze. She courtesied prettily to both of us; and then the mischievous imp of merriment chased away her demure expression and she clapped her hands.

"Ah, *Messieurs Rouge et Noir*," she cried; and the next instant was abashed again at her effrontery. Yet it was by this title that she knew us ever after; and in fact the appellation, not so inappropriate, attached itself to us throughout our wanderings together. But for the present the Trevor blushed like any girl as red as his own hair; while I, I received the sally with a smile and a twirl of my mustache. The steward came to the rescue of my friend's confusion.

"Well, gentlemen." He eyed us shrewdly, albeit somewhat anxiously. "Now that you know the full responsibility, do you wish to reconsider?"

Trevor's reply came almost before my own.

"*Jamais de la vie!*" we both cried with one voice.

"*Bien.* A further explanation is then necessary. To be brief once more. *Mademoiselle* has estates which are not inconsiderable. You will readily understand the advantage to be gained by attaching these to the party of the Guise by a marriage of compulsion. I may say, in fact, that candidates are not lacking; of whom one of the most persistent is this Monsieur Duchésne, who is high in favor with the duke's brother and whom our champion here so prettily disarmed."

The girl's eyes flashed in indignant recollection of many importunities and she stamped her foot with determination.

"You will understand, then, also our desire to convey *mademoiselle* to a place of safety; you see, gentlemen, I am perfectly frank with you; the thing will not be easy. Discretion will be required and valor, qualities which one does not pluck from every bush.

"This much, I am glad to be able to announce, has already been accomplished. A pass, signed by the Guise himself, for the passage of Madame du Garnier through the gates of the city has been obtained possession of by one of our loyal adherents. I need not say that we propose to utilize this pass for our own purposes. The details of men and equipment I leave to you. As to funds—that is the easiest part. They will be ample. I will say only that speed is essential before the subterfuge be discovered. Now, gentlemen, what say you?"

I looked at Trevor and he at me; then both at the steward. There was no need of discussion.

"How soon will *mademoiselle* be ready to start?" we both asked together.

The steward beat his hand upon his thigh with a resounding slap.

"*Tiens*, that is well said! As soon, gentlemen, as you can make your preparations."

We rose.

"Tomorrow at noon, then," said I.

The steward nodded a satisfied approval of this promptness and, unlocking a gilded *escritoire*, he drew forth a leather bag which chinked with a music mightily grateful to my ears.

"Gentlemen," he said with earnestness, "it is my regret that I can not ride with

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you, for I am known and my presence would excite suspicion. Permit me to wish you good fortune now, for tomorrow I shall not be able to see you. But never fear, all arrangements will be ready; and believe me, gentlemen, whether you fail or succeed I shall remain your debtor."

WE BOWED; I with a flourish toward *mademoiselle;* Trevor with his somber salutation of a barbarian. We were escorted through the silent passage. The forbidding door opened as if by magic, and in the next instant we stood once more in the gloomy street of the dead houses.

"Name of saint!" I breathed. "But what a rare luck! What eyes she has, what lips, what hair!"

But—

"So?" said this cold-blooded monster by my side. "I had hardly noticed. How are you proposing, my friend, to make so many preparations by noon tomorrow?"

He was a savage, this Virginian, a Goth, in whom such radiance of beauty could arouse no poetic emotion. Yet there was a pertinence in his inquiry. Courage, I was able to assure him—I was no stranger here. I knew my Paris. For me such preparations were simple. Before the dawn already I had routed old Saultier, the coachmaster, from his frowzy bed and had arranged for a suitable conveyance, to which I conceived the quite clever idea of having him inscribe the monogram of the du Garnier upon its panels, sealing his crafty mouth with a couple of gold-pieces.

For the rest, I knew that the young Marquis de St. Croix who had campaigned with me would dispose of a brace of good horses which I had long coveted; for a wound in the thigh rendered him incapable for many a long day to come. Though, *morbleu*, it broke my heart; had I but had the time I would have diced with him for them, and so would have acquired them for the price of a pleasant play; for, *dâme*, Fortune, the fickle jade, was surely in the ascendant.

Six stout knaves who had served with me and whom I could trust, I deemed, with our own good swords, ample against any eventuality of the road, and to this Trevor heartily agreed. For ourselves, breast and back-pieces and tassets would not be too heavy for hard riding. But Trevor would have none of it, swearing roundly that such trappings did but hinder speed and agility and were of no avail against a good sword anyhow, while against a poor one, *corbleu*, no protection was needed; in which argument indeed I found good reason.

Our equipment for this venture of ours, then, left nothing to be desired, for the leather bag of the steward was inexhaustible. In very truth my heart sang as we made these expenditures, purchasing everything of the best. Yet at the last, a strange conceit upon me, I determined not to exchange my old worn scabbard for a new one; for I held it a part of my sword, and the familiar friendly feel of it was not lightly to be replaced. At that the whimsy came upon Trevor too, and laughingly he decided to do likewise. So that there were the two of us, fitted out to the king's taste, yet with our swords sticking from the ends of our disreputable scabbards. It must be admitted that we enjoyed the touch of grimness that the incongruity imparted.

By noon then, a veritable cavalcade, our party drew up at the gloomy number 26. No need to knock this time. Almost before our dismounting the great door swung and *mademoiselle* tripped down the steps before I was able to spring forward and offer my arm.

It was significant to note that she was masked and that there was no ceremony about her departure which might occasion delay or attention. I looked to Trevor to call his attention to the fact; and then—how it happened, I can not say—while I yet executed a bow of the most approved form, she had leaped the intervening steps and had taken the arm of Trevor and stepped lightly into the carriage. My chagrin may well be imagined; though at the sight of Trevor's serious discomfort it was perforce changed to merriment.

And indeed we were a merry enough party as we rode through the streets. The six varlets whom I had hired had indeed nothing to worry about; they had no responsibility to weigh upon their minds and they were well paid. As for us, while our responsibility and the chance of danger were not lost sight of for a moment, *dâme*, was that a matter to weep about on a fine Summer's day?

Though for that matter, I was not anticipating danger from any source other than the remotest accident; for this Trevor, with

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his cold-blooded method, had questioned me as to every eventuality and everything was guarded against. Even as to the exit from the city; I had chosen the gate of the rue de la Paix, for the captain of the guard there was a veteran of the campaign; many a main had we thrown together by the bivouacs.

Which indeed was a fortunate circumstance; for, the pass being taken to him by a trooper, he came out himself to cast an eye over our party; but, recognizing me, naught would satisfy him but that I enter and take a cup of wine with him, over which he informed me that orders had come that very morning to inspect closely all outgoing parties; but knowing me for an old comrade who had fought for the League he had no suspicions.

In faith I breathed easier, though, when we were safely beyond the gates and the towers of Notre Dame were but a haze in the distance behind us. Such good speed had we made that within the hour we came to the forked roads at Noaille; and there, having in mind the order about especially close inspection while I had no reason to imagine that it concerned us in any way, I deemed it the better strategy to strike the more southerly route, which, though longer, was by that very reason the less likely to be followed. We took the road, then, at a smart trot, purposing to cover as great a distance as the coach-horses might contrive before seeking relays.

BON DIEU, but how good it was to be on the road again with a good horse between one's knees and the merry wind whistling past one's ears! I looked across over the top of the coach to observe my friend Trevor, who rode, as did I, by the side of the farther door. He too was exhilarated by the same intoxication of the open road; his somber expression was suffused by a sparkle in the blue eyes which looked keenly on all sides, drinking in the beauty of all God's good sunlight; and he whistled thin airs of atrocious barbarism through his teeth.

Once again my heart warmed toward this man who could love the road with all its vicissitudes and chances almost as well as I. Yet a trouble which grew as the day sped began to take hold upon my mind. And it was caused, of course, by a woman. What troubles does one have when one is twenty-five and has God's good health except the troubles of women?

The little minx whom we escorted was restless in her conveyance as any caged kitten. Ever she kept thrusting her pretty head forth to demand what village we passed, or what road we followed, or what speed we made, or where we would lie for the night; a hundred foolishnesses. And each time she leaned out, not on my side to make her inquiry, but on Trevor's. As for him, while he was still as awkward as any Goth, his stiffness was noticeably wearing away and he showed no disposition to shorten unnecessarily the time of his replies.

Need it be said that I was mortified? For only too willingly would I have had the glances of those so ravishing eyes directed at me. Yet it was not pique that troubled me; it was a feeling of deeper significance. My friend, I reflected sadly, was of good family; she, on the other hand, had estates; she was impressionable; and he, *parbleu*, was a whole figure of a man. Why not then? *Peste*, such is fate—when one is twenty-five!

My friend whom I had so recently found would settle down, would become a respectable pillar of the State and would thus be lost to me; for the woman does not live who will not sooner or later succeed in weeding out the bachelor friends of her chosen man.

But I had little time to reflect upon this ill turn of fortune. There were many matters to encompass attention; food, relays of horses, lodging for the night, the constant need of maintaining speed, and unending vigilance; for I was uneasy about the stratagem of the pass. There lay our danger; for if its loss from the du Garnier be discovered in time there would undoubtedly be a pursuit. But thanks to the good God and to the able assistance of Trevor, whom even his pleasant dalliance could not hold from the business in hand, we progressed into the third day without mishap. One more day's ride and we would be knocking at the gates of Morneaux.

But such an even fortune was too good to continue. It was on topping the long rise that cuts through the woods of Angers that, looking backward for the thousandth time, I saw a flurry of dust rounding a far bend of the road and knew it to be galloping horsemen.

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"What think you, my friend?" I demanded of Trevor.

He had eyes like a hawk, this Virginian. For some moments he squinted against the sun under his hand and then announced calmly:

"A good half-score, and they ride well-armed. Also as if the devil twisted their tails."

His lips parted to show the strong teeth as he looked, and the light in his eyes was that of a young girl about to witness a play. *Sang d'Dieu,* I believe the ruffian was actually pleased! Of course, there was no cause as yet to anticipate that this party had any interest in our affairs, except the speed at which they rode suggested a pursuit. But that man of precautions, Trevor, had insisted upon a discussion of even this eventuality and we had prepared ourselves with a plan of procedure and also with a little stratagem.

Bidding the postilions drive on with their precious burden, and to keep on driving toward Morneaux as if Satan and all his satellites were behind them, we turned to await the furious riders and, should they prove to be hostile, to do our endeavor to stay them, so that the maid at least might escape. The little stratagem was but to conceal our varlets, three on either side of the road in the coppice, as an ambush.

FOR a space we waited. The blood in my veins began to tingle, and in faith, if this Trevor were whistling thin discords through his teeth while his infant-blue eyes screwed in a critical smile, I will do myself the justice to warrant that my own countenance was at least not suffused with pallor. Shortly my barbarian whooped an uncouth cry, doubtless of those red savages of his Virginia.

"Yoicks and away!" he cried. "'Tis he! None other than our antagonist of the gaming-house, the Mayennard! And he rides in a red rage. Well met! Friend Étienne, we stand upon the imminent edge of a right sturdy fracas."

His whistling thinned down to a soft hissing and his eyes narrowed to hard slits as he loosed and drew slowly his long blade from its sheath. As for me, I looked to the ground upon which my horse stood, spurring him forward a few paces to a spot free from rubble; for it is ill to expect a good beast to answer to touch of rein and knee with the swiftness and surety that are needful in an encounter when his feet slip from under him on account of a rolling foothold.

It was well that I had thought for this precaution; for I had expected at the least that the pursuit pull up to a parley, to question or to make their demands for a surrender. But there was no doubt apparent in this Monsieur Duchésne's mind that he had come up with the right party, and yet less thought of calling a surrender.

His choler was indeed stamped plainly upon his face. His eyes and his bared teeth gleamed white against the dull red of it as he called a hoarse order to his fellows and without a stay or a pull of rein the whole ten rode down upon us twain facing them in the highway.

A sturdy fracas it was indeed. Yet of the encounter what can I say? There was naught of interest nor of particular skill to warrant a lengthy description. It went as such encounters are wont to go. A fellow slightly better mounted than the rest rode at me with a ferocity that outbalanced his judgment, holding his blade in high tierce. *Eh bien,* what was there to do? I received his faible in strong opposition and let him impale himself upon my derobement. I was almost sorry for the poor fellow; but, *que faire?*

My point emerged beneath his shoulder-blade and twisted him fair out of the saddle as his horse thundered past and went on galloping madly up the road riderless. The next instant another was upon me. And in the next instant again our brave fellows leaped from their ambush and took the attackers at a sore disadvantage.

Within a few minutes the affair was over. I myself had been unhorsed at my second encounter with two stout fellows who pressed me from either side. As soon as I had contrived to free myself from amongst the flying hoofs I stood to render what assistance I might. Though there was scarce any need. Of our antagonists, besides the one I had run through, four groaned upon the highway; and I myself assisted the flight of the last of the others with a shrewd prick in the rump. And then I had time to observe what proceeded behind me.

Of no interest, have I said? But I recant. What passed was a pretty sight. As I looked the Duchésne was rising from

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the roadway, his doublet of crimson velvet well-powdered with dust and the left side of his face a fair match for the doublet from a cut over the temple where he must have tasted the lightning blade of friend Trevor, who smiled down upon him with an amazing good-will. It was the smile doubtless that rendered the Mayennard maniac; for he rushed at my friend, mounted as he was, foaming at the mouth and emitting incoherent sobs from the throat.

Trevor's red brows corrugated with annoyance; he had thought the affair ended, but this man was berserk. *Mordieu*, he should have run him through the throat from his advantage and finished it. Instead, the fool, he parried easily two wild lunges and then with a tight smile of purpose on his lips, holding the other in play the while, he prepared to dismount.

"'Sblood, I am no trooper," he grumbled. "When I play with the sword I have a preference for my own two feet."

Ciel, but who ever heard of such an insanity? This was a parlous maneuver, this climbing down from the saddle while an enraged antagonist thrust fiercely at him. And indeed the outcome might well have been of an irreparable tragedy. As he stepped to the ground, hampered as he was, the Mayennard's sword flashed past his guard and bit deep into the upper part of his sword-arm!

I uttered a cry of despair and leaped forward; for, *corbleu*, I could not regard this as an affair between gentlemen to be settled without interference. But the Duchésne in his insane rage let his opportunity pass. He wasted time to permit himself the luxury of triumph. His voice was a raw scream.

"*Ha, mon loup rouge!* Now let me see whether you can repeat that lucky trick of the disarmament. This time, *ss-sapristi*, it is my turn!"

Yet Trevor snatched time to leap backward like some great red ape, alighting on both his feet in his awkward crouch of such even balance, and his voice was as cool as his smile.

"But of a certainty, *Mossiou le Mayennard*," he replied and therewith transferred his sword to his left hand!

This again put a different complexion on the affair. If indeed this astonishing Trevor could play with his left hand then advantage was all his again; for a left-handed fencer presents an unaccustomed defense and attack. But the infuriated Duchésne rushed upon him without thought and thrust savagely to make an end.

It filled me with relief and delight to see Trevor's long blade lick out in a parry and a riposte as sure and as strong as ever; the amazing man had indeed taken the time and trouble to perfect himself with both hands. The light of devilment was in his eyes. He spoke slowly, between breaths, as he shifted his ground.

"But certainly, *Mossiou*, will I—*instruct* you in—the trick again. Only—this time we—parry in prime, so; and—*rr-r-r-ras-sp!*"

With the words Duchésne's sword sprang from his hand and executed a roulade in the air, the while my friend's point, continuing its thrust, took him in the shoulder with a neatness that should have been a pleasure even to the victim.

"And we throw off, thus, in sixte," concluded Trevor with an angelic humor.

"*Ça va pour le Rouge!* Bravo! A pretty sword!" cried a voice shrill with excitement; and there stood *mademoiselle*, who, we learned later, had bullied the weak-willed postilions into permitting her to alight and had immediately returned to view the combat, arriving precisely at the heroic moment of triumph. Was it not a scurvy trick of Fortune?

Eh bien; what remains to be said? We bound them, the Duchésne and his wounded fellows, back to back and left them by the roadside to curse after our departing backs and at one another. I took it upon myself to assume the paternal rôle and to chide *mademoiselle* for her indiscretion. To which she gave me pert looks and turned to Trevor for support amidst a hundred inquiries for his arm and a thousand protestations of grief in that it was in her defense that he had received his wound. But his appreciation was that of a Goth. It was clear to me that his thoughts dwelt yet on the fray and he was full of a silent laughter and of a great joyousness—as indeed were we all.

WITH much good humor and bantering our cavalcade resumed its march, now no longer a flight; and before nightfall we were knocking, as I had prophesied, at the gates of Morneaux.

The steward had given us an address, the Duc de Frontenac, to whose keeping we

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were to deliver our something of very great value. A veritable mansion this residence proved to be. A gorgeous majordomo received *mademoiselle* and spirited her away in the twinkling of an eye, while we were conducted with ceremony to a splendid reception-room and requested to wait. And here too—the depth of my mortification can only be imagined—this methodical oaf of a Trevor must needs be constrained by some unconscious instinct of caution to examine the windows for an exit. I rushed to drag him away by the arm, when a lackey drew aside an embroidered drapery and announced—

"Le Duc de Frontenac!"

And following immediately upon his words a familiar voice—

"*Messieurs*, I have the pleasure and the very great honor to salute two brave gentlemen."

We turned in a flash, and, *pardieu*, there stood none other than our steward, smiling with a vast friendliness. He came forward with both hands outstretched.

Of his greeting and his effusion of compliments I shall say nothing. Suffice it that he thrust upon us a credit and a fanfare of thanks as if we had undertaken a most unpleasant and arduous task instead of but a joyous venture of the road. Over and above that, he thrust upon us another bag of the musical leather twice the girth of the first; and therewith offer of honorable employ in whatsoever capacity we might desire; and thereafter more compliments.

It was in the deepest confusion that we were able at the last to retire to the suite set apart for us and to talk over our adventure and—for my part—to plan for the future.

"As for you, my friend," said I with a sadness that I could not disguise, "I suppose that you will, er—make the most of this very good fortune which your conquest——"

"*Hein?*" he demanded of me. "What do you drive toward?"

"She is a very beautiful girl," I hastened to explain. "I offer my felicitations of the most——"

"Blood of St. George!" He leaped to his feet as if pricked by a sword. "Is that what has rendered you so lugubrious these last ten hours?"

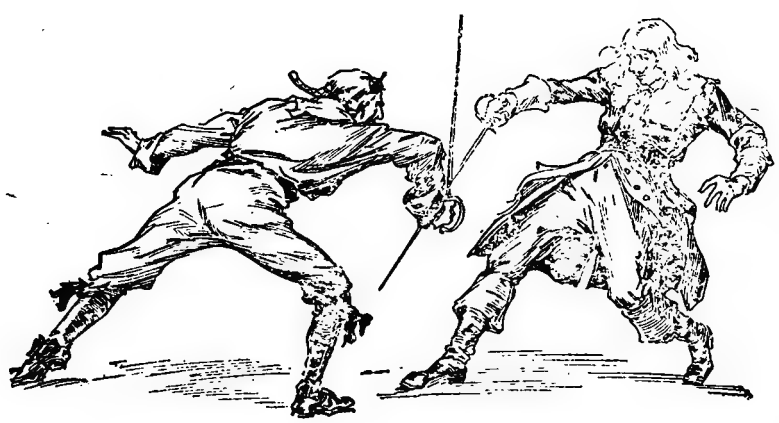
"But certainly," I replied. "Is it not clear to the eye that——"

"But, you are an insane, my friend. Listen," he cried, and his somber expression was serious while he laid down the law with a strong finger wagging under my nose. "In this France of yours are a million beautiful women of no understanding. But a friend who understands the joy of the open road and its chances is one in a million. Besides, princely fool, have you forgotten? Have we not, besides our two good swords, now two good horses? And the world is then, as you yourself have said, a capon pasty for us who dare."

——, how I had misjudged this man! I sprang to my feet, a great gladness in my heart.

"*Vive donc, Rouge et Noir!*" I shouted. "We follow the lure of God's good road and we play the hazard together!"

And to his vast confusion I leaped upon him and embraced him.



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QUICK-DRAW SIMS

By George Gilbert

Author of "The Man Who Could Read Static"

I'D BEEN off toward Mesa Brillar, where the big mica rocks are hunting broom-tails for Ox Bow, and I had to make a dry camp, for me and Starbright, my black-dotted-white li'l hoss.

He worked his picket-pin loose and went wandering and squandering off and when I woke up in the dawn's early light I was about the most useless animal west of the Mississip'—a cow-puncher without a hoss between his bow-legs. Starbright, he'll do that little thing once in a while; he's just that inquiring. He hears a noise he wants to tuck into his ear, or smell a smell, and he works at his pin and he goes, *muy pronto.*

I wasn't worrying about Starbright. He'd drift, either way, down to Ox Bow or maybe over to Sandy Bar, our trading-town. And I wanted to think he'd drifted toward the Bar, for I sure wanted some words to say with some one—no matter who-all. So I hid out my blanket and saddle and I started to walk a bit, hoping when I hit the lower trail I'd catch maybe a ride on a freighter's wagon or a buckboard.

I hit the trail and, rambling along quietly, the dust puffing up every time my footsies hit ground, I didn't make no more noise than a road-runner when he's corraling a rattler with cactus-spines. And so, when I was a long ways off, I saw him. He was standing with his back to me and perfectly at peace, from his actions, with his environments. You see he had his eye cocked for men on hossback, not for men afoot, like I was, and so he was off guard. He was doing the queerest thing. I dropped behind a bunch of greasewood and watched.

He was practising draws, all solitaire. Yes'r. He'd slap his hands to his hips and snap them in line, just like he had a pair of six-guns, butts snug-gripped, and he'd act like he was fanning the hammers a spell. Then he'd snap those ghost-guns into his invisible belt and then do it all over again. And he didn't have a gun on him. He was almost back to me, so his face wasn't to be prospected and he was so interested in himself that I let him alone for a spell. Then backed off up-trail a bit and struck square into it and began to sing:

> "'Way down on th' Brazos!
> Hawg's back's sure like razo's.
> Corn in the bin
> Bacon on the rack
> Steers fat es sin,
> Niggers awful black——"

By that time I was up to him and he was standing, mighty still. He was thin, gaunt, hard-bitten, if ever a man was, but his gray eyes were friendlywise. A man maybe about fifty. Hair silvering. Quick-acting.

"I must be rambling towa'd Sandy Bar?" he asked.

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"Which you sure are," I smiled to him. "My pony, he pulled his freight in the night. He's either to the Bar or to Ox Bow and I want to think he's to the Bar, because there's folks there I'd like to turn words into conversation with."

"I'd be glad of your company," he edged in and so we began to ramble.

Oh, not far, because pretty soon Three-Finger Peter, who was on Ox Bow with me then, came along in the buckboard with the wall-eye ponies hitched to it and he drew up to laugh at me.

"Luke Allen, you better use yourse'f for a picket," he teased, like. "That Star-bright hoss he was waggling his head over the corral bars by the dawn's early light and we knew he'd deserted your bed and board again."

"I'm sorry for that, Peter," I says.

"Why?"

"Because now I ain't got any excuse to go to the Bar, except that I'm going."

"Sure; pile on, somehow, both of you."

I looked at the thin, gaunt man.

"Sure I'll ride," he says; "my name is Frank Sims. Same to you, Peter."

"I got to get some tin-cow and other truck for the cook," Three Finger explains. "You-all hold on whiles I pour the leather into them wall-eyes."

Which he did and it wasn't no time before we was a-weaving into Sandy Bar, where Three-Finger turned the wall-eyes loose into the wagon-yard and we got organized for a trip up to Faro Mike's to get a snort, when who came along but Shorty Holt, who wasn't yet out of the swaddling clothes of matrimony after marrying the Widow Bedotte, the best cook on the ranges. He was in front of their snug, homey shack.

"Sure, I'll go," Shorty says, his eye over one shoulder, like a man married to a widow will, to make sure his motion is not amended none. "I want to chow with *men* a while."

"You, Shorty Holt," Missus Holt that was the Widow Bedotte called from inside.

"I'll step in front of you three tall geezers and you-all walk close order," Shorty says appealingly, "and maybe she won't see me. I want some man-talk, I tell you."

We formed a phalanx and Shorty, he was safe, though she called twice before we got out of ear-shooting distance.

In Faro Mike's—

"My Crimus, I call this luxuriant!" Shorty says, easing his belt, like a man will when he feels easeful. "Put a name to it."

It being morning, the deal-box was turned up. Faro Mike was loafing and the bar-keep' polishing around. Sims, he passed his handle to Holt and we organized. I saw Faro Mike, who is an old-timer, was studying this new man some as Mike leaned his chair back again' the wall and smoked.

When it came Sims' turn he fished out a V-bill, all smooth and nice, and pasted it a-top the bar. He tucked away the change careful, like a man will that's only got that much. When we'd finished, Mike came loungin' over. Sims eyed him keen.

"You know who I am?" he asked.

"Yes," says Mike; "you're Quick-Draw Sims."

"Your thinker is controlling your brains some," Sims says, and his voice rung hard.

"Twenty year since I saw you," says Mike, "when this camp was young and long-horns was wild on the ranges, 'stead these white-faced, tame cattle. Then came the placer flare-up, the stamp-mills. Oh, it's a long-come-short since I saw you, Sims."

Sims?

He was balancing on his toes, his hands straying to where he hadn't any gun-butts to feel of. He pushed back his hat. His hair was not much for length, so't you could notice it.

"Le's snort," says Mike. Steady. "To ol' times, past!"

"I'll do it," says Sims, his eyes lighting up a bit.

Which we did.

That old Sims coon, he got my eye quite a whole lot. I spraddled out with him. Three-Finger Peter went with Shorty, who wanted to show him the new patent pump he'd put in for Missus Holt. So I went with Sims.

WE TWO sat down in the shade of the faro-joint and I rolled a corn-husk one. He looked hungry and I offered. He dug up a pipe from somewhere and filled. Then we was comfortable, Sims was—on top, anyway. But on his inside? He kept studying me whiles we talked about everything—steers and rustlers and brands and pinto hosses—you know. He kept circling his words around like a pony circling his picket-pin. Of a sudden he bored in—

"Luke," he says, his cold gray eyes holding my brown ones, "I dunno what I'm

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goin' to do, be a man or a mouse."

"Shucks," I says, "you won't ever be a mouse."

"I dunno, I'm studying myself," he says. "I been bad. I'm just out of prison. Twenty years for holding up a stage over near Fresno. Twenty years, San Quentin. They thrown me loose last week. I been coming, overland mostly. I got some rides on trains, begged a few meals, caught some rides on buckboards. I got a few more good years left and I'm going to live them rapid."

"As how?"

"I dunno. I want action—money. That five-spot is what they give you to start life over again."

"Say, old-timer," I says, "things is different now. You hold up Faro Mike's now and get away with it? Telephones and telegraphs go everywhere. You'll get corraled, no time, because you're not saddle-tough, and you're weak yet. Yes, they'd round you up and strangle you *poco pronto*."

"I dunno. I'm Frank Sims—Quick-Draw Sims. Why so? Oh, you young geezers pack guns, you can shoot, *when* you get them out. But what wins? To snap your guns in line quicker than the other fellow. One shot does it—if it's a center shot. I got two darned good guns buried near here. A friend of mine cached them for me. I had them ordered when I stuck up that stage, and my friend, he got them when they came, after I was inside. He got me word after a time that he'd buried them over near here somewhere. He was lopin' off this-away then and he cached them. I know where. I was here once when this camp was a yearlin'."

"Them guns'll be some rusted?" I cut in.

"Not none. He put them in a tin box, in oilcloth in a dry place. Pair of frontier-sixes .45's. Pearl handles, solid frame, ha'r triggers. Bad!"

He puffed, meditating on his meditations.

"You forget it, old-timer," I says, getting up. I could see Three-Finger Peter was coming out of the Emporium with a load of truck.

"Mebbe," says Quick-Draw, "I gotta live some rapid to make up for them twenty years in San Quent'. I dunno what. I was bad when I was young—shootin' it out with every one; sticking up stages, holding up faro-banks, jumping claims. I always fought eye to eye; never shot a man in the back. But I was bad. I dunno. But I never stole a hoss, rustled cattle, *nor went back on my word.* I got some morals."

I left him there, smoking and cogitating his inteelecks. He was queer. Just like that. Why didn't I go tell Faro Mike? Oh, Mike, he was able-fingered and I thought Quick-Draw was gassin', like old-timers will. And Three-Finger was yelling at me to he'p him down to the wagon-yard. And I thought maybe Quick-Draw'd mebbe an' likely as not take some days to think it all over. Did he?

Yes, he did!

AT OX BOW I he'ped Three-Finger tote the grub into the cook-house and then I went down to the corral to tell Starbright what fer a miscreant he was to leave his lord and master away up on Mesa Brillar that-a-way. He nickered at me and begged for a chaw of eating-terbacker, which he got. Then I slatted him with my wide-brim alongside his fool head and he went down to visit Three-Finger's pony by the windmill and I went in to chow.

I was that dog-tired from walking them miles that day that I burrowed my ears into my blankets good and early and was enjoying life in dreamland in B bunk-house when the yelling broke loose and I came b'iling out to find the ranch-yard full of mounted men, with Faro Mike at their head, swearing mad.

"What d'ya think that old tarant'la of a Sims done?" Mike yelled to me when Parkins, who owned Ox Bow, came out.

"I dunno even who he is. What'd he do?" Parkins asked, teetering on his toes.

"He held up my joint tonight. We cut his sign, riding this-a-way. He didn't get my big roll; justh' little, light-play one——"

"Crimus!" I says. And then I told what I ought to told before. And got told things for not telling before. Folks is that way, times.

"He won't get far," Faro Mike says. "That old jack rabbit ain't been on a hoss in twenty year an' he's some sore above the hocks now. He can't ride like he once could."

Well, we all turned out. We found sign where the Sandy Bar trail branched and it led us up a side-trail over toward Dry Creek.

"He's making for the river and railroad,"

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Three-Finger says. "I bet he don't."

There were no takers, for when it was daylight the sign was too plain to be misread.

"He's riding that split-hoof bay of Mexican Charley's," Shorty Holt says. "He was our best trailer."

It's light enough now to see what I couldn't see by lantern light.

"Every hoof-mark of that hoss shows where his hoof was split that time last month when he stepped on to that coyote-trap when me and Charley was riding herd over to Three Bar. Charley left that split-hoof in Sandy Bar wagon-yard for me to look after. Sims couldn't 'a' picked out a worse hoss, and him saddle-tender for twenty year. That split-hoof bay, he's pizen mean when he wants."

And then we came to where it had happened. We could see where that split-hoof had taken a pasear, like a bronc will when he has thoughts on his brains—a little side-stepping pasear. And then the sign showed a miskelleyaneous lot of hoof-marks and a dent in the dust, where Quick'd hit the ground. Then the bay hoss had gone one way and Quick-Draw—limpin'—another.

We spread out and, in a dip among the sage-brush, we found him. He put up his hands, *pronto.*

"I been a fool," he grinned, his cold gray eyes glinting. "You'll find all the bank-roll inside my shirt. I didn't shoot no one getting it. I was a plumb fool to think I could run a blazer like that—and me saddle-tender twenty year. That bay hoss, he was plumb deceiving, too."

"Oh, we'd had a dozen posses on you with sun-up, if needed," Mike says, swinging down and going for Sims' guns, while a few of us kept him lined up with ours.

"Telephones and telegraphs and other modern inconveniences he'p a lot. Especially as you ain't fittin' to ride a hobby hoss without pads. I'll take your artillery, Sims."

He snapped out those two pearl-handled guns. Then he sucked in his breath—whistled. We saw him hold each gun, look at its cylinder, half-cock it, then twirl the cylinders with his thumbs.

"Not a load in them—that old he-wolf stuck us up with empty guns," he snorted, glaring.

"I relied some on my rep'tation," Sims laughed, low-like.

"You relied well," says Three-Finger.

"I didn't want to kill any one. I just figured if I could bluff you-all, I'd do it and spend the money in one ——uva bust. I been away from action for twenty year. If you had shot at me, I'd died, for I didn't load those guns, not wanting to kill any one."

His voice was some plaintive, then. He eyed Faro Mike.

"You old chuchawallow," Mike bellered at him. "You're a throw-back, a has-been. Coming out of jail after twenty year and running a blazer like that on me. What'll we do to him, boys?"

"Do something quick. I wish I had a chaw," says Sims, appealing-like. "So't I c'n set my teeth on it an' not let my jaw wabble as you send me over th' Divide."

I give him some of mine.

"If it was old days, we'd naturally strangle you," Mike says, less mad now that he'd got his bank-roll back. "I dunno, now."

"Turn him over to the sheriff," some one says.

Sims' face went white at that.

"Naw," he pleaded. "I'll go back to San Quent' for life, then, as a confirmed criminal. Here; take a gun and do it. It'll end it all, *pronto.*"

"No," says Mike, looking the old killer over. "Say, Sims, your word always was good. You ride back to Sandy Bar with us. One of the boys'll catch that split-hoof bay——"

"I ain't going to ride no mo' for some time," says Sims, rubbing himse'f numerous. "I'm sore on hosses for a while."

We managed to ease him back as far as Ox Bow and there Faro Mike borrowed the buckboard and loaded Sims in.

"I've got an idea about this ol' badger," Mike says to Parkins. "He didn't mean no real harm running that blazer on me. He's living in the past. I ain't going to make any charge against him. If any other gent wants to he can. Scratching chollas! Holding me up with empty guns!"

"I might's well had 'em loaded," Sims says, grinning. "They'd worked just as well."

Then the Sandy Barites lit out and we went about our own business—sleepy, but just about time to begin work. Life's that-a-way; times when it ain't.

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I WAS a-racking over to Sandy Bar a few weeks later. I went in to see Mike. He was dealing, lazy-like. A few of the boys was in and a few strangers. Play was running low. On the lookout's stool was Sims, them good old frontier-sixes of his belted on, guarding the game.

Mike nodded back toward Sims.

"I hired him—three squares a day, ter-backer, a hoss to ride. He's in clover, he says," Mike allowed. "I furnish cartridges. Curly Alf—Mike's lookout prior—has gone to deal his own game in Tumencaro."

"Happy? Which I am," Sims says, sassy as a titbird scolding a sidewinder rattler from a safe perch on a *palo verde.* "I'm honest now. Any one who tries to hold up this faro-bank sees me—through th' smoke!"

"He's promised me he'll track squar' and like a human," Mike explained, then he turned.

"Four win; Jack lose," he called.

After I'd doubled my pocket-money I had sense enough to go down to Shorty Holt's to visit and the Widow Bedotte—I never can call her Missus Holt, hardly, she made that impression on my inteelecks when she was a widow—she asked me to stay to chow with her and Shorty. Say—fried chicken, biscuits, cake, coffee! I leave it to you, after salt-horse, *frijoles,* slum, Mulligander——

They slept me there that night, on their spare cot. Me not used to white sheets like Missus Shorty coddled Holt with, I got woozy along in the morning and teetered out and sat down to watch the sky grow pink. A pony nickered down in the wagon-yard and I could hear Mexican Charley singing "Las Palmolas" or some such greaser tune. I rolled a corn-husk one and then I heard a hoss coming and then a man was looking down at me from on top of that same horse. I swept him once with my eyes, then lighted up. What did I see?

He was chunky, squatty; skin tight about his jaws, jaws spready like a rattler's. Eyes reddish. Hair gray-streaked. Maybe forty-five. The man acted like one who was saddle-hard, a good rider, an all-day-and-night rider.

"A mean man," says I to myself. Being with friends I wasn't organized to say it out loud, for my six-guns hung on a peg at the bed's head. I'm a heap hind-sighted, times.

"What fer town's this?" the mean-looking man asked.

He was packing some able-looking guns, too, I saw on a second look.

"Sandy Bar's its handle," I says, puffing languid-like.

"Faro Mike turning bank here?"

"For twenty year, come next grass."

"I'll light down and stay—a while," he laughed.

He rode to the wagon-yard. I saw him turn his hoss in. Then he came up-town, slow, easy, confident, like a man that could take care of himself. I was there yet.

"Guess I can eat soon?" he asked.

"Sure. The Wheat Stack Restaraw'll open after a bit."

"Thanks," and he went on, quiet, easy, so confident.

Then he turned back. I was puffing, quiet.

"I'm going to stay here quite a spell," he offered. "My name's Allerton—Buck Allerton of over Barilla way."

That didn't offer me no news; I didn't care. I'd never been up to Barilla, a good three hundred mile north, and didn't ever mean to. So I just nodded, friendly outside. But inside I was wondering what was back of that low-flung skull of hisn.

"Mean," I says to myself, as previous; "Mean. A mean man."

Later when I lured Shorty Holt away from apron-string innocence and over to Mike's, there sat Allerton across from Mike, who was turning faro for him, alone. It was just time-killing, none of the regular tiger-tamers being up and around, organized at that hour.

"Just to pass away a few hours," Allerton says to me as I stood and watched. "I don't never play heavy. We two are amusing each other."

Quick-Draw Sims wasn't there. He came on his stool during afternoon and evening hours. Other times he was foot-loose. Faro Mike kept his big roll down to the Wells Fargo office in the big safe, when play was light. When it got brisk he'd send out for maybe a few bales or whatever them big bills come packed in.

Mike hadn't chick nor child and no one knew what fer roll he did have except himself. He rented one part of the Wells Fargo strong-box for his own uses and was private banker for most of us. Lots of them old-time gamblers was like that. Sure, they was!

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"Say, wha'd'ye think?" a man called in the doorway.

"You've thought; shoot it," Mike says, then, as he turned—

"King win; deuce lose."

It was Mexican Charley there. He bellered:

"Mail-rider's in from Upper Verde. Laws' Brill has struck a big vein there—four hundred dollars to the ton."

"Pah," and Mike spit; "he'll be down bucking me, then. He's apt to, when he's flush. He plays big. I'll have to dig up my real roll if Laws' Brill comes to Sandy Bar."

I don't know why I was watching Allerton then, but as Mike spoke, his eyes glowed, then paled. It was so quick I thought I was off till afterwards.

After a spell I made Starbright rack me home at a fox-trot.

I DIDN'T have no yearnings for Sandy Bar for two weeks. I went down then, visited Shorty Holt and the Widow Bedotte that was, now Holt. That was the excuse I gave Missus Parkins, boss of the boss of Ox Bow. I had to give her some reason. I knew she didn't believe it, but it comforted me to lie to her. What I wanted was a whirl at Faro Mike's. I was due, with six months' wages itching in my sock. I knew I'd get square action. Those old-time faro-turners were all fair. They had to be, or they got shot up a whole lot. Only the honest ones survived.

To put a good face on it, I did visit Shorty and Missus Holt a while. Then it was I got news of the mean man again.

"No one likes him," Shorty says to me, as we sat on our hunkies out behind his shack. "No one has anything to do with him except who?" His voice turned up into a question sound.

"Tell it; you're the budget," I says.

"Except old Quick-Draw Sims," says Shorty.

"Yes, an' that old Gila monister ain't with him for no good," says Missus Shorty, her having a pan of potaters in her lap, paring while she watched that I didn't take Shorty away into danger to his mortalities.

"They got thick as hops," Shorty says, "soon after Allerton drifts in here. Sims spends all his spar' time chowing with Allerton. He sits out his lookout spells, sleeps and visits with Allerton. Them's his short and simple annals of the poor, to date."

"There they be now," says Missus Shorty, pointing with her paring-knife.

We peeked around the corner of the shack. There the two came, teetering along the road, their heads together, whispering-like.

"I don't like him," says Missus Shorty.

"Which?"

"Oh, both I guess. They ought to strung that Sims up when they had him right."

"Oh, I dunno," I says. "I like his eye. He's been bad, but is he?"

"I say yes. Faro Mike's getting soft in the bean to let him be lookout," and she sliced into a spud with skill that I admired.

Shorty?

He was too sensible to argue with his running-mate. So he kept his opinions to his inteelecks.

"Has Laws' Brill burned up any trails yet with that four-hundred-dollar ton-er?" I asked.

"Not yet. He's coming out soon with his wad, after selling to that Tucson syndicate," Shorty says. "He's give out he'll buck Faro Mike cl'ar off'n the layout. He never got at Mike yet when he had enough to play a he-man's game, he 'lows."

"Does that Allerton play none?" I asked.

"Oh, some. He acts like a man that was waiting for events to eventuate—for a chance to unscrew the inscrutable," Shorty says.

"I wish he'd go; and take that Sims, too," says Missus Shorty, paring away.

"You ought to see Allerton shoot, son," Shorty says to me. "We all got making braggadocio down to the wagon-yard come a week yest'day. We all did our little tricks, but Allerton's lightning! He kept cans in the air till his guns all were shot out. He broke bits of mud throwed up. He shot a cigaret out of Sims' mouth. I guess he lays over us all. The boys been pretty shy ever since. No one wants to start anything with him. Not that he's tried to make war-medicine; he's as peaceable as lambs."

"As a stuffed snake—stuffed full o' tit-birds," Missus Shorty says, paring, vicious.

"Did Sims shoot any?" I asked.

"Not none. He allows he's too old for fancy-fawncy didoes."

Sure enough, Allerton and Sims were thick as two thieves. They were batching it in a lone shack down near the wagon-yard, where Sims unrolled his blankets

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first-off after Faro Mike turned him loose in town. Allerton had gone there with him. They ate at the Wheat Stack; loafed together. Allerton didn't play faro much or do anything. He seemed like a man waiting for the stage to come in all the time.

I spoke to Faro Mike about it.

"Oh, Allerton's a man that'd be bad, if he had the edge," he parried, "but with Quick-Draw looking me out and me with my guns handy, where'd he get off? He's got to start something before we can act. I might run him out of town on suspicion, but then folks'd laugh at me. You let me kill my own tarant'las, son."

"If you feel that independent," I said, "all right. But how about Sims?"

"He give me his word he'd be squar' wi' me, son," wagging his black-thatched head at me. "I've looked him in the eye. His eye is hard, but I c'n see bottom to it."

"But he's around with Allerton all the time."

"I ain't asking where he spends his spare moments. Maybe them two's been both bad 'way off yander back of the years before ever Quick-Draw got into that jackpot that put him into San Quent', eh?"

"Maybe."

MAYBE it's two days later when I was shed of my winnings and debating whether to take my foot in my hand and go to the wagon-yard and get Starbright and ride back to Ox Bow with the remains of my roll and pride, when I came around the corner of Faro Mike's, looking for shade, so't I could roll one and meditate on my meditations. Who'd I see there, alone, but Sims and he practising draws, like when I first seen him. He was intent on it, too. He never saw me. He was flipping his sixes out, snapping them in line, going through all the motions. And quick! Rattlers ain't quicker than he was about getting ready to shoot.

"Morning setting-up drill?" I asked sudden.

He wheeled like a flash, his guns in line. Then he smiled and holstered them.

"Shucks," he said, quiet-like; "you most scared me, Luke. Yes, I have to keep in trim. I may have to use them guns of mine, quick, any time, you know."

"Why'n't you practise in your shack?" I asked, innocent-like.

"Oh, there's generally a quiet spell out here that I can manage it before I go on duty," he answered, careless-like. "Say, you, Luke, don't tell no one; th' boys'd prod me if they knew I practised draws."

"You like it with Faro Mike?" I asked.

"Sure, who wouldn't?" Careless-like again.

"Considering how Mike kept you from being strangled," I thinks to myself, "you say that mighty light o' heart."

Then I left him. I'd decided, somehow, with that decider that goes always pasearing through the back of a man's fool head that I'd stay for one more whirl at Mike's layout that night. Ain't it the truth a man'll try one more whirl at what he likes rather'n quit when he's safe?

Along about sundown there was a beating of hoofs up from the mine-trail and a young fellow came squandering into town.

"Whoopee," he yells; "I'm advance guard for Laws' Brill, who's coming after to buck the tiger clean into the next range country."

He was Laws' Brill's mine straw-boss, Harry Yancey, he said.

Sure enough, Brill comes along later with a couple of friends. He ate, in a hurry, like a man with business on hand. News of his coming spread and when Faro Mike opened up bank early the place was crowded.

"What's the limit?" asked Laws' Brill.

We'd all quit playing, to give him room, according to his strength, though, as you know, any number can play faro simulcussedly.

"I take it as a favor of you letting me have full swing this-a-way," Laws' says as he squatted down and loosened up what looked like a blanket-roll of yellar bills.

"There ain't no limit," says Mike, cool, steady.

"Suits me," says Brill, as Mike made ready to show soda, or the first card, that's not bet on.

"Soda's j. o' spades," Mike said, low, as it came into view.

"Dead man's card," laughed Brill, then sobered off *pronto*.

I looked at Sims. He was scouched down on his stool, his eyes sweeping the crowd. I looked for Allerton. He wasn't visible to the naked eye. Mike made ready for the first turn.

"Trey win, queen lose," says Mike, steady, turning.

It broke fine for Brill. He swept his winnings in.

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"You'll need your big roll before I get this hunch that's riding my shoulders worked off on you," Brill jibed.

"I got it. I heard you was a-comin' and a-comin' all ready to shoot your wad," Mike egged on. "So I up'n drew my big roll out'n th' express safe and it's all on tap."

He turned again—

"Ace win; five lose——"

"Broke for me again," Brill says, raking in what was due him.

"It's a long, long trail, you know," Mike hummed, whilst a stir of deeper interest went through the crowd.

"Yes, I know," as Mike set himself to turn.

"Eight win; six lose."

"What'd I tell you?" Brill rejoiced.

"Which you sure did, son," quietly.

"You'll have to call out your reserves."

"They're all in th' drawer under th' lay-out," Mike says. Then—

"King win; jack lose."

My eyes roamed from the game. There was Quick-Draw Sims on the lookout's stool on gun-butts, gaze sweeping the room. When a man'd feel those hard, gray eyes on him, he'd shift about. Somehow the play didn't hold me like it might have. I suppose 'twas because I'd come prepared to bet on my ownse'f and when it didn't turn out I could back my own hunch, it went slack on me, like cold coffee will when you been honing for hot. So I let my eyes wander over the crowd. Being tall and gangly, I could see well, especially as the others were bent forward, as men will when watching a big game.

Two splits caught Brill endwise. Faro Mike smiled at the second.

"Splits are th' bank's best friend," he reminded Laws.

"Ah, make it two hundred a turn on every single card I pick?" Brill coaxed, Mike's taunt getting him anxious-like. "This small play's some wearisome. If I go to spreadin' bets again, I'll speak according."

"O. K."

Then, turning—

"Ten win, jack lose."

There was a little vacant space toward the door where the men had crowded forward. The door was open to let out the tobacco-smoke. My eye was following a gush of smoke, as a man's will when his mind's some slack, and so before I knew it I was watching that whiff of vapor float through the door-space. I heard Mike begin the new turn.

"Ace win——"

A man came through the open door, steady, lounging.

His gaze took us all in, *muy pronto*. I turned my look for an eye-wink toward Quick-Draw Sims. The man in the doorway was Buck Allerton.

No one had heard Buck lounge in, I saw, but me and Sims. Buck teetered on his foot-balls, eyes blazing. It had all come so sudden I wanted to yell, but things moved too fast. Allerton's hands swept to his gun-butts; his face hardened—his guns were out—on to us, dead.

"Hands up!"

Every one froze. From an eye's corner I saw Sims there on his stool, hunched down. Mike's hands went up; Brill's, mine, every one's.

"Up, thar, lookout, or——"

Sims' hands went up, too!

"You let him in on us," Mike growled, "I took your word——"

"Ah, shet up, an' keep those han's up! Line up, too, ag'in th' wall, on either side——"

As he gave orders Allerton came toward us, guns menacing, never shaking a hair's width. We parted before him, like water parts before a swimming bronc's chest in a deep ford.

Sims, his hands up, obedient, slid off his stool behind Mike as Buck came to him.

"Ag'in' th' wall, lookout," Allerton growled, guns on to Sims for an eye-wink. He had us all, cold.

The middle of the room was clear. Sims in line with that clear alley edged back. I thought of what Missus Shorty'd said about the old coot.

"He promised me—" I heard Mike, who'd been jostled next to me in the shifting about, complain. "Said he'd guard th' game ag'in' all comers."

Sims seemed hardly to stiffen as he was sidling away from his stool. Yet as his body went from soft yielding to steadiness his hands whipped to his hips. I saw Allerton's guns swing toward Sims.

A CRASH of flaming guns, lines of fire crossing, smoke billowing! I saw Sims' guns fairly leap into play, yet Allerton's spoke first, for he'd had his ready for use, while Sims had to draw from

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a dead cold deck against Buck's "age." Yet so lightnin'-sure was Sims that his first shot was not a split-second behind Allerton's opener and then Sims' guns streamed fire to match the hold-up's—as his trained thumbs fanned the hammers.

I was to Sims' side first, easing him to the floor. I heard Faro Mike say, as he bent over Allerton:

"Sims got him, plumb center; no second shot needed, but he put three more into his head——"

A bloody froth was on Sims' lips; his lungs wheezed.

"He got me in th' wind, young timer," and his voice whistled as he tried to keep hold on his nerve, "but not till *my* guns had spoke.

"He saw me through the smoke, as I promised Mike," he gurgled as I eased him out flat. "I kept watch of Allerton. I kept with him, so't I could look him out. I thought if I stayed with him he'd tell me what his lay was and take me in on his game, so't I could tell the camp and run him out. He almost fooled me, he was so smooth. But when he came in that door I froze me eyes on my man an' saw what his game was, and worked it out so't you'd all be out the line o' fire. You-all been good to me and I didn't want any one hurt unless 'twas me. I don't matter, an old killer, with my best years spent in San Quent' like that. Lay me out flat; I can't breathe."

"He's as flat as he can be got," Mike said, straightening up and snorting to hide a sob, like a hard-faced man will. "Darn old tarant'la. He give me his word, and he kept it, too. He'd go on my pension-roll if he was a-going to live, which he ain't likely to, none——"

"Where's my Shorty Holt?"

It was the Missus Holt, splurging in.

"I heard shooting. Is my Shorty hurt?" Tears in her tones.

"No, not none," Shorty says, emerging from under the lay-out.

"I thought not," snappily; "no one could hurt you. Why, who's hurt here? Is that old Sims?"

"Which it is, that same," Mike admitted.

"Then what's he doin' there, on this dirty floor? You take him to my house, where I can nu'se him. I ain't had a man to nu'se since Bedotte died an' I do surely admire to nu'se men. Shorty, he don't never git sick an' give me no chance. You say, Mike, Sims won't get well? You're a liar, by the clock. Get a-hold, men, an' take him down to my shack."

Which we did. And Sims?

He's lookout for Mike many's the year after that and he shone away up among the picture cards in the annals of Sandy Bar ever and a day after.

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The LUCK of "HARDLUCK" KARLUK

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

By Norman Springer

Author of "Number One Macey," "Fire Mountain," etc.

"HARDLUCK" KARLUK, the pearl-fisher, and Peter Strakopapolous, the pearl-buyer, talked shop. They sat upon opposite sides of the combination table-locker in the tiny cabin of Karluk's lugger. Upon the table lay the sensation of the year—Karluk's find. It was a pearl, of pear shape, extraordinary size and marvelous orient.

Undoubtedly it was the pearl of the decade. Peter Strakopapolous vowed it was the pearl of the century. Seven days before, while working a mother-of-pearl bed at one of the Buccaneer Islands, Karluk had, with his own hand, wrenched a great gold-lipped oyster from the sea-floor; with his own hand, too, he had forced open the shell and disclosed the treasure to human ken.

Peter Strakopapolous regarded the treasure with explosive rapture and Karluk gazed at Peter with an air of placid contentment. Karluk was happy. He had made his find. For ten years he had walked and crawled about the ocean-bed in search of this rare gem; now it was his to barter for money; and a competence, home and wife in the town of Copenhagen had changed from a distant ideal to a certainty of the near future.

Karluk knew that on shore the men of Broome, from governmnent officials to shanty-pub hangers-on, were discussing his find and offering bets that Karluk would not profit from it. He knew, too, that the bets went begging. He knew his own reputation. It took no second sight on that coast to prophesy hard luck for "Hardluck" Karluk.

But Karluk had no fears for the safety of his find. His was the serenity of the born fatalist. His previous bad luck had been due to circumstances over which he had no control; why allow it to worry him?

This was not the first big pearl Karluk had dredged from the tropic sea. It was the third, and it was because of the other two that men misnamed him. When he was less than a year on the coast, he made a rich find on the Eighty Mile grounds; and due to inexperience he permitted a drunken pearl-doctor in Cossack to peel the jewel to ruin.

Three years later his second big pearl was found. But Karluk did not find it. He dumped a boat-load of rotting oyster-meat upon the beach and sailed away. A wandering aboriginal with a taste for carrion poked into the mess and picked up the bauble which, later, an Amsterdam dealer sold to an Argentine hidalgo for a prince's ransom. The black fellow sold it to a Roebuck Bay publican for a bottle of gin and a broken phonograph. The laugh was on Karluk; "Hardluck" Karluk.

But this time his treasure was safe. He kept it under his own eyes when it was not reposing in the little pocket he had sewed on the inside of his undershirt. There was no man on that coast who would offer him violence for theft's sake. As for deceit, there was no room for it. The gem would be within his sight or feel until tomorrow,

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when Colin Ramsay returned from Derby.

Then the pearl would drop into Ramsay's hand, and thence into Frye & Phillpots' strong-box, and Karluk would carry away Ramsay's receipt and voucher. When that happened, Karluk knew the men of Broome would change their tune, and he would be "Lucky" Karluk.

Peter Strakopapolous sighed heavily. Peter had an eye for beauty and the artist's temperament.

"It ees—" He groped with his hands and explored his English for the proper word. "—wanderfeel!" he finished lamely. "I have no speech, Meester Karluk. It ees the pearl of the sunrise. It ees the pearl of heaven. It ees the pearl for a name. You have called eet, Meester Karluk?"

"Well, I hadn't t'ink anything about a name," admitted the practical Karluk. "I ban let the buyer do that."

Peter Strakopapolous made a gesture of protest.

"When eet is the great pearl, like this, it ees good luck to the finder to name eet," he declared.

Karluk ruminated for a space.

"I found it on Smith's Shallows," he said. "I t'ink it ban Smith's Shallows' Pearl."

The pearl-buyer groaned with wholehearted disgust.

"No, no, no!" he expostulated. "It mus' be a name from the soul; a name like the poet geeve. It ees a pearl superb; it ees like a tear-drop of God; it ees like a cheep of 'eaven; and you would call eet— Oh, my word, no, no!"

"I t'ink I not care what she ban named," responded Karluk indifferently. "How much is she wort'?"

Peter Strakopapolous sighed again.

"What does eet matter? You weel not sell to me," he said.

Karluk grinned. Of course he would not sell to Peter Strakopapolous, and he was glad the latter knew it. There would be no hard feelings. He was a well-known "one-firm" man; he gave all his sea-loot to Frye & Phillpots, where his good friend, Colin Ramsay, was manager. But the Greek had begged to see the pearl, and had promised him a true appraisal of its value. Karluk wanted this appraisal to use as a basis for argument with Ramsay next day.

"I like to know what she is wort'," he insisted gently.

The Greek picked up the gem and turned it in his long, pliant fingers, holding it to the light of the swinging lamp overhead, the better to observe the luster. Karluk watched the other's hands closely. He did not distrust Peter Strakopapolous; the latter was of good repute, and the best known independent buyer on the coast. Moreover, the Greek was alone with him, a half-mile from shore, and quite at his mercy. But Karluk had determined not to let the pearl out of his own ken for so long as an instant, until he handed it over to Ramsay.

Besides, the hands of Peter Strakopapolous always surprized and fascinated him. They were so out of keeping with the man they belonged to. The Greek was a rotund little man, and by rights should have owned short, pudgy hands. Instead, he had thin, delicate hands, with long, tapering, dexterous fingers that were so supple they seemed boneless. Peter Strakopapolous' hands were his most remarkable feature, the thing about him that people remembered and talked about.

The long, limber fingers seemed by their caressing touch to enhance the sheen of the gem. Karluk remarked how the pearl seemed invested with life, as the pearl-buyer's expert fingers turned it about in the lamp-ray. It seemed to breathe, to exhale its beauty; and it glowed most gloriously against the Greek's mud-colored skin and in contrast with dull gold of a snake ring of curious workmanship that he wore on a third finger. Karluk was impressed and pleased. His find was, perhaps, even more precious than he had thought. He was glad he had decided to display the gem for the Greek's pleasure.

THE buyer produced a small square of black velvet from his pocket and spread it upon the oilcoth-covered table. Then he placed the pearl upon the velvet. He moved it this way and that with a delicate forefinger, and Karluk observed how the jewel seemed to leave a trail of light upon the rich cloth.

"Wanderfeel! Grand! Superb!" exclaimed Peter Strakopapolous in ecstatic accents. "It ees of the best! It ees like the tear of— Oh, my word, Meester Karluk, I 'ave for eet the name! It ees like the tear of the Blessed Virgeen! The Virgeen's Tear! It ees a grand name? No?"

"But how much ban I get?" responded Karluk.

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The Greek splayed his fingers in a gesture of hopeless surrender

"It ees you have not soul," he remarked. "You 'ave not seen beauty; you see just money. Oh, well, you will get for heem—much money."

"How much?" persisted Karluk.

Peter Strakopapolous settled himself comfortably in his chair, and, still keeping his eyes riveted upon the jewel, produced and lighted a cigaret. He held the burning match in his hand for an instant, until it blazed high, and it seemed his preoccupation would earn him scorched fingers.

The heat, perhaps, recalled him; he started, suddenly half-arose, and tossed the match out through an open port-hole that was opposite and above the table. The blazing stick lighted the black circle of the port and dropped into the night. The pearl-buyer leaned back in his seat again and began to talk:

"Een the oceans, Meester Karluk, there mus' be many pearls like this. Yes? But on the land—there are but two that will match eet. One—it ees in Stamboul, in the Grand Seraglio. It ees a pearl of Omar, and ees not to buy. The other—it ees a pearl of Ceylon, and it go from India to China, oh, many, many years back. It ees lost—in Pekin, perhaps. This pearl, eet will go—who knows? To a hareem in the East? To a throne in the West? To a palace in America? The dealer who gets thees pearls, 'e will name his own price. And you, who have found eet, you will get your price. Much money. Five t'ousand poun', six t'ousand pound, there is no price to feex for such a pearl. I, Peter Strakopapolous, will give you tomorrow seven t'ousand five 'undred poun' in gold for thees pearl!"

Karluk smiled. "I don't t'ink I sell you," he remarked.

The Greek sighed gustily.

"I know. You sell Frye & Phillpots," he observed. "It ees a good firm; I do not blame. You tell Meester Ramsay what Peter Strakopapolous say about thees pearl and 'e will pay you my price. Meester Ramsay knows that Peter Strakopapolous does not meestake in his beesness. Seven t'ousand five 'undred; it ees a fair price on thees coast. In London, Amsterdam, New York—who knows? Feefteen, twenty t'ousand poun', maybe. Ah, it ees so beautiful!"

Peter Strakopapolous uttered these last words softly, tenderly. He had stopped fingering the pearl; indeed, he removed his hands altogether from the table and left the jewel in splendid isolation upon the piece of velvet. But he crooned over it and devoured it with his eyes.

"It ees the last time I shall look at eet," he explained to Karluk. "Never will I see it again, and it ees so beautiful."

Karluk smiled, a little pityingly. He thought there was something soft, a bit "balmy," about people who raved over pearls. Personally he didn't care much for pearls. Diamonds made a richer show—or even a flashy ring, like the Greek had upon his finger. Still, he was very glad some people did rave about pearls. It made them valuable. And now he had obtained the Greek's expert valuation, it was time he put the thing to bed in his singlet.

He even started to move his arm, to pick up the pearl. Before his hand reached the table-edge, the movement was arrested and his attention caught by sounds on the deck above. He heard the sound of running feet and the voice of his Manilaman bosun, Mario, calling his name.

Before he could answer, or move, his treasure vanished before his eyes. He saw it go. The end of a stick fell upon the table, and whipped up again—and the pearl went with it. Karluk's startled eyes beheld it for just an instant, a patch of white flame in the open port. Then it vanished into the black night.

With an inarticulate bellow Karluk leaped to the port-hole. He saw nothing outside save the sweltering, stygian night. He thrust his arm through the port; the opening was but a foot or so above water-level, and his fingers dabbled in the tepid flood. Then his groping hand touched flesh, the wet shoulder of a man. He clawed, but the wet flesh slid from his grasp and was gone.

Karluk snatched in his arm and wheeled about. Peter Strakopapolous was sitting bolt upright in his chair, eyes popping, mouth agape, too thunderstruck to utter a sound or make a move. But there was sound and to spare beyond the locked cabin door—a frenzied thumping and Mario's voice calling:

"Captain, captain! Topside—quick; we burn!"

Karluk rushed on deck. At the first glance he saw that the bows of his little

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vessel were aflame, were indeed a high-leaping torch. But he wasted no more than a glance on the blaze, or on his native boys, who danced in panic on the poop. He ran to the rail, to which the dingey was moored. The painter leaped on board under his eager pull. There was no boat there and the painter had been cut.

Karluk next seized his rifle from the cuddy and tried to spy the fleeing culprit from the deck. The flames lighted the smooth black water for a wide radius about the lugger, but there was upon the lighted surface no living or moving thing, no swimming head, or floating boat. Beyond the circle of light he could not see, but he pumped some shots at random. There was no response to the fusillade save distant shouts from the luggers moored half a mile away, near the mangroves.

So Karluk swore and threw down his rifle. Then he shrugged his wide shoulders and went forward with his crew to fight the fire that was roaring aft.

"THIS stick seems to be almost the only clue discovered," said Inspector Carmac. "Constable Kenyon found it in the boat; it was undoubtedly left behind by the thief, or thieves. Your story and Peter's are quite negative for police purposes. You didn't see anything. Neither did your boys, if they are telling the truth. No clues at all, except your boat, abandoned on the beach, and this piece of wood. But the stick at least tells us how the trick was turned. Clever—I'll admit it."

Karluk picked up the evidence and inspected it without comment, for the fourth or fifth time. Peter Strakopapolous fanned himself with his hat and confessed himself also, for the fourth or fifth time, to be absolutely at sea regarding the identity of the robbers.

"My word—it 'appened so queek, I see nothing," he protested. "It ees clever—yes; they try to burn us weeth the sheep."

"No, I do not think the fire was started with murderous intent," observed the official. "Of course, it was incendiary; the petrol-fumes that Karluk detected and the rapid spread of the blaze prove that. It was started, I believe, to prevent immediate pursuit in case the thieves—I assume more than one man did it—were spied from the deck. With his vessel on fire, Karluk would have no time to waste on what was likely to prove a wild-goose chase. I think that is the way the thieves reasoned. It was clever, I admit. What do you think, Karluk?"

Karluk stared glumly at the instrument that had separated him from his fortune. It was a simple contrivance he held in his hand, yet an instrument admirably suited to the purpose to which it had been put. It was no more than a limber switch of young ash, some five feet in length, with one end thickly smeared over with the milky, sticky gum of the Queensland upas-tree.

It was a substance more adhesive than fly-paper. It was of less value to the police than a piece of fly-paper might have proved, for, as the inspector pointed out, fly-paper might be traced, but this upas-juice was native to nearly every jungle scrub in tropical Australia.

Karluk's melancholy gaze wandered from the thief's tool in his hand to the compassionate faces of his companions, and about the barely furnished office of the police-station. He was in search of words. He found them finally in the broad back of a uniformed trooper who stood on the veranda and whom he could see through the window.

"I t'ink mine pearl is gone," he stated.

"I'm afraid it is," agreed the inspector. "There is really little hope we can recover it. We have nothing to work upon save Peter's very fine description of the jewel; and you may be sure the thieves will never offer it for sale in Australia. Singapore, most likely. We haven't even a vague description of the man who lifted it; the beggar just thrust the sticky end of the stick in through the port and nipped it off the table.

"Neither of you saw so much as his hand or arm, and you can't guess as to his color. Not much doubt it was a native of some sort; it's a native trick. But what sort? Might be that Arab crowd from Aden; they're tricky. But then, they are all tricky, Arabs, Hindus, Cantonese, New Guinea boys, our own local blacks, the whole bally boiling. Might be any one of them. By the way, are you quite sure that Manila boy of yours is honest?"

"*Ja*, Mario ban with me for five years; he would not steal," declared Karluk.

The official nodded his agreement with this statement.

"I judged him honest, but one can never

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be sure about natives," he said. "Well, we'll do the best we can for you, but I fear our best will not be very much. You can see for yourself how small is our chance of success. Peter, here, tells me he is sailing next steamer for Samarai and Sydney-side; but I have his expert's description of the pearl, which may help. We'll do our best. Too bad, and I'm devilish sorry, Karluk. What with the fire, I suppose you are quite cleaned out. Hard luck, I call it."

Karluk considered a moment, and then delivered judgment upon his luck.

"It ban not so bad but it might be vorse," he told Carmac. "I have my diving-harness safe. I have the wreck. Mario will stand by me. Today I start to build me a new wessel. I have yoost lost me a pearl; I find plenty more. Mine luck ban not so hard."

SIX months later Hardluck Karluk was at Thursday Island, a voluntary exile from the West Australia grounds. It was no scarcity of mother of pearl that impelled him to desert the environs of the Eighty Mile Beach. He had done very well in the clumsy but seaworthy cutter he had constructed out of the charred bones of his trim lugger.

But every white man he met persisted in sympathizing with him over his hard luck, and Karluk despised sympathy. He didn't need sympathy; he was as lucky as any man with shell. When after months the nuisance did not abate, Karluk determined to visit waters where he and his reputation were not so well known.

He had decided to try pioneer's luck in the Gulf of Carpentaria, and was outfitting for that voyage, when a yellow man, called Lu Wong, of the Canton clan of Sin, induced him to alter his plans.

Sin Lu Wong was a public character and a prominent citizen of Thursday Island. Under one corrugated-iron roof he conducted an hotel, junk-shop, gambling-hell and opium-den. He was, besides, the head and spokesman, in Torres Straits and adjacent waters of the numerous Sins, and of the allied Hongs and Sus and Yungs.

Tong chieftain and man of substance was Sin Lu Wong. In person, he was clean and sleek and affected the European fashions in clothes; in manners he was suave and of soft voice, and his English had much less accent than Karluk's; in character he was, to Western eyes, opaque.

Karluk knew the Chinaman slightly. In former years Sin Lu Wong had paid annual visits to the Western Australia pearl coast to act as advocate, judge and labor-agent for his countrymen there residing, though when years and flesh and power became his, Sin Lu Wong stopped at home on Thursday Island, and sent subordinates a-field. Karluk needed stores for his pioneer voyages, an anchor and rope and canvas. Quite naturally his thrifty Scandinavian nose led him to the Chinaman's junk-pile.

He was bargaining in the littered yard with one of the lesser Sins, when the great Sin himself detached his large person from the shady stoop and waddled to Karluk's side. Sin Lu Wong greeted Karluk effusively. He shook his hand, European-wise, and declared his eyes were gladdened by the sight of an old and dear friend from the West. He begged to put himself at Karluk's service.

Karluk explained his needs.

"You shall have them," declared Sin Lu Wong. "Your pick of the best. The plice? Oh, velly cheap! Maybe nothing; if you will do a little work for me."

"I do not vork for other men," responded Karluk with the haughtiness of the born free-lance.

"It is your kind of work," said Sin Lu Wong. "It will be fo' yourself. I will pay much money. Little work."

"I ban bound down the gulf," replied Karluk. "But what is the yob?"

"It is hot in the sun," said Sin Lu Wong. "We will go inside and talk."

It was even hotter indoors, beneath the corrugated-iron roof. But it was quiet, and in the secluded corner of the hotel bar they were very much alone. Karluk sipped lukewarm beer, and Sin Lu Wong told a story.

There had lived in the city of Sydney, said Sin Lu Wong, a venerable and very honorable gentleman named Sin Yat Pu. But he lived there, alas, no longer. Some months before, Sin Yat Pu had contracted the sneezing-sickness of the white man and "died velly quick."

Now Sin Yat Pu had been to Sin Lu Wong what the latter was to the lowliest Sin coolie on the northern coast; almost god. For Sin Yat Pu, when alive, was the family headman, the clan chieftain, for all Australasia.

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"He was the big man of Sin," explained Sin Lu Wong. "When alive he was revered and obeyed. When he died, honor was paid him and his body was shipped to China, to repose there amid the bones of his honored ancestors. He was shipped by the steamer *Pujarra*, of the Kangaroo Line."

"The *Puyarra* boomped ground t'ree months ago and went down," interjected Karluk.

Sin Lu Wong nodded his head gravely. That was the whole trouble, he explained. Thrice accursed ill luck had hovered over the remains of Sin Yat Pu. The safe and unsinkable *Pujarra* had touched the coral and sunk. Sin Yat Pu did not rest beside his ancestors in sunny Canton; he lay in his metal casket under twenty-five fathoms of water in the lee of Cape York. Wherefore was there much sorrow in the family of Sin.

It was a most unfortunate, a really terrible state of affairs, averred Sin Lu Wong. The great Sin Yat Pu could never find peace beneath the sea. His spirit would be ever restless, ever haunting the living Sins.

"No dead Chinaman can sleep well except in China," said Sin Lu Wong. Nor was this all, or the worst. The family of Sin was ancient and rich and owned much 'face.' Some of this face was lost for so long a time as Sin Yat Pu dwelt, not in the hallowed ancestral cemetery, but in the slime and ooze of the sea-floor. Therefore Sin Yat Pu must be rescued, salvaged, brought again into air and sunshine. To that end did Sin Wong talk to his friend, Captain Karluk.

"Me? You mean you vant me to go down after the old Chinky?" queried Karluk.

Sin Lu Wong nodded, smiling.

"Even so," he said. "I told you it was work in your line. Velly easy. Good pay."

"I t'ink not," commented Karluk. "I t'ink maybe it ban a tall yob. Twenty-five fathoms is not good depth. Besides, I ban read about the *Puyarra*, about the salvage-gang at work on her. If it ban so easy, why didn't they get your Chinky?"

"Velly good leason," responded Sin Lu Wong, quickly. "They dived for gold in the ship's stlong-box, and for nothing else. They come flom Sydney and work under a boss; and he would not let them get Sin Yat Pu, even for much pay."

"Oh, contract yob," remarked Karluk. "Well, then why didn't you get him yourself? I know you have t'ree big yunks and I know you have Chinkies and Manilamen going down after shell. Why do not they get this old man?"

"Chinaman do not touch dead men under water," answered Sin Lu Wong. "It is velly bad luck for Chinaman to bring up dlowned man, even Sin Yat Pu. No Chinaman e'cept a Manchu fool will do it. And the others, they are not white men; they feel the same. Too much aflaid. It is a job for a white diver; white men are aflaid to die, but they are not aflaid of the dead. It is deep; too deep fo' natives. That is why, when I see my fliend, Captain Ka'luk, I think, 'He is the man!' For I lemember Captain Ka'luk in the West, and how lucky he was with shell, and how he went down deeper and stayed longer than other men."

Artfully the yellow man paused and permitted his compliment to sink into the other mind. It did its work. Unwittingly, perhaps, Sin Lu Wong had touched the right chord. Karluk warmed toward his companion. It was the first time in ten years that Hardluck Karluk had been called lucky.

"*Ja*, mine luck ban not so bad," he agreed with the man of Sin. "I have lots of time. I t'ink maybe I do the yob—if the pay ban right."

SIN LU WONG arose and left the room. Presently he returned with two long rolls of paper beneath his arm. These he spread out upon the table before Karluk. One paper was a large scale chart with penciled markings of the environs of Cape York and the Raine Island channel into Torres Strait. The other was a sectional and detailed blue-print of the steamship *Pujarra*.

"You will see the job, how easy it is," said Sin Lu Wong. "Then I will tell you how velly much money the Sin family pay for Sin Yat Pu."

He leaned over the table and with one long-nailed finger indicated the pencilings upon the chart.

"These marks all light," he informed the Dane. "The boss fellow of the salvage-crew made them; that much he do fo' me."

The chart was plain reading to Karluk's sea-wise eyes. The wreck of the *Pujarra*, he saw, lay several miles to the southeastward of Cape York, upon the western edge of a coffin-shaped reef that made one of the Albany group of islets. Though he had

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never been in these waters, Karluk was no stranger to knowledge of Coffin Reef. It was a notorious graveyard of ships.

The chart told him the *Pujarra* had scraped the edge of the Coffin and sunk in the deeper water of the channel. The printed figures said the depth was twenty-five fathoms, with hard coral bottom; the penciled markings placed the vessel in twenty-three fathoms, cask-buoyed stem and stern. A notation on the margin said, "Wreck cradled in coral on even keel; current strong and dangerous."

To reach the ship seemed to Karluk to be, even as Sin Lu Wong declared, an easy job. To search her for a dead Chinaman might be a different and more difficult job.

Karluk had served his under-water apprenticeship in salvage-crews, and he knew what it was to poke into the insides of sunken ships.

He started to explain this matter to Sin Lu Wong.

"It ban look easy," he said, "but one can not tell from the top. She lies on her bottom. To reach an upper hold was not so hard, maybe; but to reach a lower hold—" He reached for the blue-print. "What hold is the old Chinky in?"

"Sin Yat Pu is not in the hold," stated the Chinese, a little haughtily. "I have said that Yat Pu was the big man of Sin. Would the Sin family ship its headman as if he were a common coolie? Sin Yat Pu was placed in a cabin; the best that ship of ill-fortune possessed. He had two men of Sin blood to watch over him and do him honor. You will find them down there; they could not leave Yat Pu. But you need not tlouble about them; they were low caste and do not matter. It is Sin Yat Pu we want."

Karluk studied the plan of the vessel's upperworks.

"What stateroom ban he in?" he queried.

Sin Lu Wong indicated a cross upon the paper. "That is it. Numbel 7, deck cabin, stalblo'd side."

"It does not look bad," observed Karluk after a moment. "Outside room, but the door ban inside, through the saloon. Maybe I chop t'rough from the deck. But listen—this says the current ban strong. Maybe I go down and not find the Chinky. It is t'ree mont' the *Puyarra* is under water. Maybe the cabins ban gutted, swept clean by the current."

"The casket of Sin Yat Pu is like an anchor," said Sin Lu Wong. "It is of steel and lined with lead. In Sydney, six stlong men of the docks walked it on the ship. The cu'lent could not move it; it is still in that ship of evil."

"I t'ink maybe you don't know much about currents under water," retorted Karluk. "They move ships; why not coffins? But I t'ink maybe the Chinky ban still there."

"If Sin Yat Pu is there or not," said Sin Lu Wong, "you will be paid if you go down."

"How much you pay?" asked Karluk.

"It will be velly much," promised Sin Lu Wong. "The Sins are rich, and we will save face by this work. The pay will be like this: For each day you are at the task, you will get ten pounds. When you have finished, if you have not got Sin Yat Pu, we will still pay you a bonus of one hundred pounds. If you have got Sin Yat Pu, we will give you five hundred pounds."

"Yumping Yimminy, you pay that!" cried Karluk, amazed. "I take the yob!"

"I am velly glad," replied Sin Lu Wong. "I know it is your luck to bling up what is under the sea."

FOR the rest of that day Karluk was as happy and excited as his temperament permitted. He did not dance or sing, but he went about his business with his head so high in the air it would have pierced the clouds had the brazen sky contained them.

He was happy for several reasons. One reason was that he had at last found a man, even a yellow man, who believed in his good luck. He formed a very high opinion of Sin Lu Wong's sagacity.

Another reason to be happy was the princely munificence of the Sin family. Karluk had little doubt he would salvage the dead man, providing the latter was still in the wreck; and the five hundred pounds, added to what he had saved from the wreck of his fortunes in Broome and to what he had accumulated since, would enable him to exchange his crank and eye-sore cutter for a certain trim ketch he knew was offered for sale.

This was his dear and urgent wish. The wish had become certain of fulfilment in the very near future. A week—two weeks at the most—should see the job completed; and even if he failed to recover the old

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Chinky, the bonus of failure added if he failed to recover the old Chinky, the bonus of failure added to his *per diem*, might sufficiently increase his capital to permit the purchase.

It would be all clear money, for he need spend not a shilling to prepare for the expedition. The family of Sin was saving face by outfitting him with sea-stores free of charge.

With so much good fortune to fill his mind, Karluk was in no mood to entertain regrets or doubts. During the afternoon both the past and the future were brought to his attention by dismal tongues. His high spirits were unaffected. The past was dead; and as for the future—he and another believed in his good luck.

In this wise he met his past: He was hurrying down to the beach when a well-remembered voice hailed him from the veranda of McInerney's Hotel. When he rather reluctantly responded to the hail and walked up into the shade, he shook hands with Police Inspector Carmac of the Broome station.

"So you've taken your hard luck out of the West?" commented Carmac jovially, when greetings had been exchanged. "Well, I don't blame you, Karluk. You may have better luck up this way."

"My luck ban not so bad," growled Karluk.

"Nor so good," added the other. "When did you leave the West? No news, I suppose, of your pearl. But of course not; the case was hopeless. I've been down Sydney-side for several months, you know, on leave. On my way back, now, though I'll lay over here for a month's chin-chin with my brother who is sub in this district.

"Speaking of Sydney, I encountered a mystery down there that is as baffling as your pearl-theft. Peter the Greek, who was with you, you know, when your pearl was stolen? Well, he has dropped from sight in Sydney. Walked out of his hotel and didn't come back. I remembered the beggar had been connected with your case and I looked into the matter at once. No possible connection between the two.

"Peter didn't skip the country; he just disappeared; and he left behind him a small fortune in pearls, a fat bank-balance, and all his affairs at loose ends. Knocked on the head for his pocketbook by some larrikin gang, very likely, and his body disposed of. You don't suppose his disappearance could in any way be connected with your loss?"

"It could not be," said Karluk. "Peter ban mine friend. Besides, we both saw the pearl when it vent out the port-hole. I am sorry for Peter's hard luck."

"I am sorry too," replied the inspector. "Peter was a nice, quiet chap. Good reputation. But he was a Greek and Greeks are slippery. That is why I thought perhaps—but of course I was wrong; the chap left a fortune behind him. You are right, the man met with hard luck. Even worse luck than yours, eh?"

"Mine luck ban good. I have business; I must go," answered Karluk, with dignity.

THE West Australian trooper, Karluk discovered, was not the only arrival from Sydney in whom he had an interest. He heard on the beach that "an old Chink 'oo is a blurry toff, my word, come in with the mail. Lu Wong and 'is crowd carried on no end w'en the blighter come ashore!"

Karluk grunted a monosyllabic reply. He was much interested at the moment in the labors of a brace of coolies, loaned him by his employer, and who were rowing a boat-load of supplies to Mario, on the cutter. He was not at all interested in the voice at his elbow.

But the voice continued, and its next words caused Karluk to turn his head and subject the gossiper to a sharp scrutiny. The voice belonged to one of his own kind, it saw; to a bearded, grizzled son of tropic beach and bay, to a man of some station, to judge from his cleanliness and air of assurance. The patent fact that the volunteer informant was no idle beach-comber, talking for the price of a drink, caused Karluk to give ear to his words.

"You 'ave tied yourself up to do a job for the Chinks, 'aven't you?" is what the man said.

In a country where one's business is one's own, the question was offensive.

"That ban mine affair," said Karluk shortly.

"No offense; I'm not trying to poke my nose in," the other hastened to add. "But you're new up this way and I'm old. I'm Steve Tunnicliffe, and that's my lugger out yonder, off your craft's quarter. I know about you. You're 'Ardluck Karluk, from down Broome way. Well, speaking on the

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quiet, from one white man to another, you're likely to 'ave some more 'ard luck if you try to turn the trick for them yellow-bellies."

"My luck ban mine affair, too," Karluk observed sourly.

"No offense," repeated the other good-humoredly. "Wot another bloke does isn't my affair, I know; and I'm not a blurry croaker, either. I've made a living, and a jolly good one, too, out of these waters for close to twenty years. I'll take a chance as fast as the next bloke. But this 'ere job of Lu Wong's isn't a chance; s'elp me, it's plain murder! You're going down to the wreck of the *Pujarra* after the body o' one of 'is relations, aren't you?

"Oh, you needn't look surprized; o' course I know about it. So does every other bloke 'ereabouts 'oo is known at all as a good man in deep water. Lu Wong offered me four hundred quid and expenses to get 'is revered grandad, or wotever the cove is to 'im; and I dare say 'e's offered you as good or better. 'E can't get anybody to touch the job."

"What ban wrong wit' it?" demanded Karluk.

" 'Oo knows wot it is?" said Mr. Tunnicliffe soberly. "The blacks say it's debbil-debbil, and the Chinks themselves says as 'ow this old 'eathen stiff from Sydney was such a murderin' scoundrel w'en 'e was alive that now 'e's dead 'is spirit goes on killin' 'ooever comes near 'im.

"Well, I don't take no stock in such talk, but something is almighty wrong with that wreck. If a bloke goes down, 'e stays down; or else 'e comes up like poor Tom Blake, an' that's a blurry sight worse than staying down, I say!"

"Have they tried before to get the old Chinky?" asked Karluk, surprized.

" 'Ave they? They've been trying ever since the bloomin' old cheese-box went down," answered Mr. Tunnicliffe. "They tried to get 'im when the salvage-crew was working on 'er, getting out the specie. They 'ad two divers, and one of them, a Sydney bloke, went into the upper works after the Chink. 'Undred quid, they offered 'im. 'E didn't get it. God knows wot 'e did get. 'E didn't come up. Clean gone. 'Arness, 'ose, lines and everything.

" 'Is mate went down after 'im, and 'e come up 'arf balmy and in such a ruddy 'urry 'e busted an ear-drum. This bloke said there wasn't 'ide nor 'air of 'is mate, but something was down there. 'E couldn't see it, but 'e could feel it about. It touched 'is back-weights, and 'e could feel it right through the lead and the rubber—like something cold and 'ellish. 'E wouldn't go down again.

"Well, no sooner 'ad the salvage-crew gone south than Lu Wong fitted out the biggest of 'is junks and went down to the wreck with a Chink diver; a bloke we called Charley Topknot, along of 'is being a Manchu and sticking to 'is pig-tail, which he wore coiled down on top of 'is 'ead.

"Charley Topknot was a decent lad and a good under-water man. I know, for I 'ad 'im working for me more than once. Well, 'e went down after the bloomin' old 'eathen. 'E didn't come up. Just wot 'appened, I don't know. The Chinks won't talk about it.

"But this I do know—they brought Charley Topknot's 'arness 'ome all complete except the breast-weights, and the rubber was slit from neck to crotch and from crotch to shoes! Yes, sir, sliced open like with a knife or pair o' shears—and Charley Topknot was missing. 'E stayed down there.

"After that 'appened, Lu Wong couldn't 'ire any Chink or native to go near the *Pujarra*. They said the wreck was 'aunted. But for that matter, 'e didn't try to 'ire them; he began to talk to the white divers. 'E offered me four 'undred and expenses, as I said, and I thought that was a ripe price for a dead Chinaman and was going to take 'im up, w'en poor Tom Blake 'appened along. Tom 'ad just 'ad bad luck, stranding 'is ketch on Ipili Reef while beating up the channel in thick weather, and 'e was down in the mouth and needing money. So I let 'im take the job.

"Tom went to Coffin Reef in the junk, just like Charley Topknot; and when 'e got there 'e went down after the old 'eathen. 'E came up again, but I say it was a pity 'e did, for 'e'd 'ave been better off dead. 'E couldn't tell what 'appened, but this is wot the lad 'oo tended 'is lines said:

" 'E said as 'ow Tom wasn't down no time when 'e got a 'oist signal. They started to 'eave in. Tom come up a ways, and then 'is lines seemed to foul. But it was a queer sort o' foulin'. The lads on top would over'aul, and Tom would rise a bit; then, before they 'ad a chance to belay,

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Tom would drop. It was like playing a bloomin' fish.

"W'en they did bring 'im up, Tom's suit was slashed to pieces, and 'e was cut all over the body; besides which 'e was unconscious from being full o' water and from the shifting pressures. Well, they emptied 'im out and worked over 'im, and after while he came around. 'E was stark, ravin' mad!

"Yes, sir! They 'ad to lash 'im down to the junk's deck to get 'im back 'ere. They 'ad to iron 'im to a cot in the jail until a steamer went south. 'E's down in Brisbane now in an asylum, and the doctors say 'e can't live long. That's wot 'appened to poor Tom Blake when 'e tried to salvage that murderin' old 'eathen!

"I wouldn't go down to the *Pujarra* for four thousand quid, let alone four 'undred! You'll steer clear of 'er, too, if you expect to drink 'earty your next birthday!"

Karluk thought a moment. Then he smiled, and shook his head.

"Other men's hard luck ban not my hard luck," he told Mr. Tunnicliffe. "I t'ink I get the Chinky. My luck under vater is good."

KARLUK was not imaginative enough to be seriously disturbed by the gruesome recital of his chance-met acquaintance. The most he got from Tunnicliffe's yarn was the rather vague thought that perhaps there was something peculiar about the wreck of the *Pujarra*, and a chap going down had better keep his weather eye lifted for signs of trouble.

This thought did not worry him at all, for he was always cautious when under water. He knew the tropic sea-floor and its dangers. He knew besides the many dangers attendant upon work in a sunken ship; dangers of fouled lines, of sudden falls through unsuspected holes, of heavy weights, suddenly dislodged, crushing or pinning an incautious explorer.

Pearl-divers, commonly, had no experience with sunken ships; he thought that very likely this "poor Tom Blake," and the equally unfortunate Chinaman had paid the penalty of inexperience. Quite likely the other chap, the lad in the Sydney salvage-crew, also suffered because of ignorance; perhaps he did not know the perils of a coral-bed.

He, Karluk, knew both sets of dangers and how to guard against them. Two men had died on the job? That but proved the job was more difficult than the soft-spoken Chinaman averred. A third man had gone crazy? That signified nothing. Karluk knew that strange maladies attacked the deep-sea diver. The "bends" might grip the brain as well as the muscles.

Now a difficult job under water, as Karluk knew, usually meant a massive weight to be shifted. If this were the case with the *Pujarra* job he wished to be prepared for it. He did not intend to work perilously in the dark, shifting great weights with a crowbar, if he could avoid it. So when his stores were on board he went to Sin Lu Wong with a request.

He found the yellow man peacefully smoking upon the veranda of his odorous rabbit-warren.

"You tell me this ban easy yob," said Karluk abruptly, "and I find out it ban hard yob."

The chieftain of Sin puffed noisily and thought deeply and regarded his visitor with round, candid eyes. At last his answer came, smooth and pointless—

"There are idle tongues in this place and a wise man does not believe what he hears."

"Maybe not, but t'ree men ban lost already in the *Puyarra*—" began Karluk.

"They were thlee fools who would not be careful," interrupted Sin Lu Wong. "That is why I chose you, Captain Ka'luk. We have agleed on this job, and given word——"

"Oh, I vill not chuck the yob," broke in Karluk. "I was not t'inking of that. I come to say I vant one more piece of stores, and then I ban ready to sail. I vant some dynamite."

Sin Lu Wong betrayed sudden excitement. He took the bamboo stem out of his mouth and leaned forward.

"You will not explode Sin Yat Pu!" he exclaimed. There was horror in his voice.

"No danger to the old Chinky," Karluk assurred him. "I vant it in case I find somet'ing down there I have to get out of the vay before I can reach the old feller."

Sin Lu Wong's surprize was evident and great. He leaned back in his chair and chattered Cantonese expletives, and his round eyes grew rounder still as he stared at Karluk.

"You are wise like a Chinese, Captain Ka'luk," he said. "But what you ask is

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not necessaly. It is plepared for alleady."

"It is?" queried Karluk, surprized in his turn.

"I have not yet told you," continued Sin Lu Wong, "that I and others will go with you to the *Pujarra*. The gleat Wah Kee has come to my house today, flom Sydney. He is the headman of Sin, my elder. Sin Wah Kee has come to do honor to Sin Yat Pu when Sin Yat Pu is lifted flom the sea. My junk, the *Ning-Po*, is leady. We sail with you, when the sun comes up."

"I don't care how many of you come," said Karluk. "I'll do my yob in mine own way. This dynamite——"

"It is not necessaly," repéated Sin Lu Wong. "Sin Wah Kee is the head of my family. He has gleat power over evil things. When you go down for Sin Yat Pu, we will make much noise with fire-clackers and gongs, and Sin Wah Kee will send the evil things away."

Karluk regarded the placid yellow face blankly; then, as the other's meaning gradually percolated into his mind, he began to chuckle.

"By Yimminy, you ban scare the ghost ven I go down!" he exclaimed mirthfully. "All right; I do not care. But I do not vant to dynamite ghosts. I vant the powder in case I boomp into a big chunk of coral or a yam of timbers which won't let me get the old Chinky out. You savvy?"

"You are not wise like a Chinaman," commented Sin Lu Wong quietly. "I have what you wish; I sell to miners. But there will be no pay if you explode Sin Yat Pu."

"I vill not touch the old duffer," promised Karluk. "I shall also vant caps, a battery and between t'ree and four hundred feet of insulate wire."

"My coolies will bling it to your cutter velly soon," said the Chinaman. "At sunlise we sail. My junk will lead the way."

ON THE third morning after, when the sun was two hours high, Karluk stood upon the diver's ladder with his weighted legs in the water and his head and shoulders above the low rail of the cutter. He was in full harness, save for his helmet and breast-weights, and as soon as the faithful Mario had finished inspecting each inch of the air-hose, he would be accoutred completely in the diver's armor and make his initial descent to the *Pujarra's* grave.

Meanwhile he rested and observed with interested eyes and ears the ceremony being enacted at the moment on board the *Ning-Po*. The cutter was moored directly over the wreck, between the stem and stern buoys, at a spot carefully chosen by Karluk by soundings as being above the sunken vessel's superstructure. The junk was anchored a couple of hundred yards farther out from the reef in mid-channel.

The distance was not so great but that Karluk's keen eyes could detect in detail the movements of the junk's crew. He was the sole audience of the amusing show; for Mario, crossing himself, had denounced the racket at "Chino make debbils!" and religiously kept his face averted from the sacrilege, while the two lusty coolies who manned his air-pump squatted on their heels and hid their heads between their knees, declaring by their attitude that the ceremony was too awful for their low-caste eyes.

The great Wah Kee, successor of Yat Pu as headman of the House of Sin, was exorcising the devils that held Yat Pu in their lethal clutch. Karluk could see him, a tiny figure in a flowered robe, sitting in state beneath a canopy upon the junk's high poop.

Behind him and before him and at various places upon the junk's deck were stationed gong-beaters, whose efforts raised a terrific clamor, to which was added the heavy musketry of long strings of firecrackers which were lowered over the *Ning-Po's* sides, to explode with a maximum of moise and smoke.

Clouds of red paper prayers were tossed from the junk's rigging to waft like swarms of scarlet butterflies upon the hot lazy air, and finally to carpet in bright patches the glass-like sea.

When the noise subsided, the figure of Sin Wah Kee disappeared from the poop. Presently a small boat put out from the junk's side and headed toward the cutter. The entertained Dane saw he was to be honored by a visit from the Sin chieftains, for Lu Wong and his elder were the boat's passengers. So, though his helmet was ready, he tarried to don it until his employers should have arrived.

The boat swung smartly alongside, and Sin Lu Wong stood up and laboriously

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squirmed his heavy body over the rail to the cutter's deck. But his companion made a more impressive boarding. The small boat's crew of two locked hands and lifted Sin Wah Kee on board; and the two air-pump coolies, in response to Sin Lu Wong's sharp command, received him in their arms and carried him to the hatch and carefully set him down there.

They all behaved as if the great tongman were a fragile freight that might easily be broken. Karluk, observing him at close range for the first time, appreciated the need of caution in the handling. For Sin Wah Kee was no more than the wizened, aged husk of a man, bent nearly double with the weight of the years he carried and of no greater stature than a half-grown child.

His face was all that was visible of his body, for his rich dress fell to his ankles and his hands were lost in voluminous sleeves; but the face was all Karluk cared to see. It was a lined and shrunken yellow death-mask, animated solely by the lashless eyes which stared straight ahead, bright but expressionless.

Sin Wah Kee gave no greeting, spoke no word; he seemed unconscious of his surroundings, wrapped up in some philosophical meditation, as he sat upon the hatch; and there was something disturbing and sinister in his strange aloofness and in the exaggerated respect the other Chinamen paid his presence. Karluk decided promptly that he didn't care for the headman of Sin.

The warmth of Sin Lu Wong's good morning and his message of good luck quite made up for his master's coldness. Sin Lu Wong was bubbling over with spirits, and voluble. He told Karluk that the rescue of Yat Pu would not be difficult or dangerous, because the evil things beneath were already routed and the presence of the silent mummy upon the hatch would prevent their reassembling while Karluk was under water.

"We come to help you," he asserted with an ingratiating smile.

"All right; don't interfere with the poomp," responded Karluk. "I go down now."

With the helmet bolted upon his shoulders, the valves carefully tested, his breast-weights adjusted and the broad-bladed bolo he habitually carried below secured at his waist, Karluk was ready. He took hold of the life-line and stepped off the ladder.

At the ten-fathom level he checked his plunge and tried out and readjusted his air-supply and accustomed his body to the pressure. "Caution" was Karluk's motto when diving; which was the reason, he was fond of saying, why he survived so many years of a life that usually killed quickly. He rested again at fifteen fathoms and again at twenty. In all, some twenty minutes elapsed between his leaving the surface and touching bottom. When he did ground he was ready for instant work.

SHE HAD landed, both sight and feel told him, upon the boat-deck of the sunken ship. The sense of feel was of much more use to him than sight, for at that depth the sea, so clear at shallow levels, was opaque. He could see dimly for a radius of about a yard; beyond that distance was deep greenish-hued gloom, to be explored only by advancing and feeling.

As the chart had forewarned him, the current was very strong. He could not stand erect against it but must lean far forward to maintain a balance. But indeed he did not try to stand or walk; it was safer and more convenient to crawl upon hands and knees. He crawled about his landing-spot in a circle, identifying, chiefly with his hands, the various objects he encountered; ring-bolts, a boat chock, trailing guys.

After a short search he found what he sought—a giant crowbar, which, before he got into harness, he had lowered upon an independent line. This bar was at once his mighty tool and his under-water eye. It literally increased his range of vision threefold, for as he advanced upon his exploration he could hold it before him and investigate the darkness—as a blind man uses his cane—and be forewarned of obstacles and dangers to be encountered.

With the formidable tool in his hand Karluk cautiously set about descending to the deck beneath, which was the cabin-deck. This was not difficult or dangerous. He crawled to the railless edge of the boat-deck and felt along it until he encountered a supporting stanchion.

Then he lowered the bar, still attached to its line and himself, slid down the stanchion, after making certain his own lines were clear. As he descended, a streamer of the pod-like seaweed of the lower depths brushed across the window of his helmet.

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As soon as he landed and recovered the bar he leaned over the rail and prodded into the gloom with his iron eye.

At arm's length the point of the bar touched a branch of coral, so he knew the reef wall was that close aboard at that point. This was surprizing information, for, as buoyed on the surface, the wreck was well clear of the Coffin, and in his soundings he had missed this jutting buttress of the reef.

There was nothing to alarm in the knowledge, but it sent Karluk across the deck to the wooden walls of the cabins, and when he presently went adventuring aft upon his hands and knees he traveled upon this far side of the deck, with his shoulder close to the wood, instead of dragging himself along by the rail and stanchions, as would have been easier. He journeyed thus because it increased by a scant dozen feet the distance between himself and the unknown, perhaps non-existent, dangers of the reef.

He had the cabin plan of the *Pujarra* laid out before his mind's eye. He was upon the starboard side of the wreck, and he sought cabin number seven. It lay well aft, the second outer cabin from the after end of the cabin-deck. He had boarded amidships.

He had crawled aft some thirty feet when the delving point of his bar struck the first obstacle to progress. It was not much of an obstacle, merely a bulging upward of the deck; but when he swung the bar in an arc he found the outboard side of the deck was ragged and splintered.

He promptly advanced toward the side to discern the cause and discovered that at this spot a spur of the reef-buttress touched the ship's side and had broken in the bulwark as the ship settled.

There was plenty of room for him to pass without clambering over the coral, and there appeared to be nothing about that might foul his lines after he had passed. But Karluk, of his long experience on the tropic sea-bed, proceeded to subject the mass to a minute scrutiny before passing it by. He slowly moved around the spur, straining his eyes and reaching to bar's length above and below.

He discovered, not on the coral but on the deck, jammed between two boards, a length of diver's air-hose. It was near his knee, and his hand encountered it before his eye. It was perhaps a fathom in length and cleanly cut at both ends.

Karluk held the hose to his helmet and identified its character; then, without hesitation, he crawled a little farther around the coral mass, and discovered—as he supposed he would—the living explanation of its presence.

It looked to the casual eye, even at yard's length, like a beautiful submarine flower-bed. It was a brilliant patch upon the coral, and it flowed and rippled and glistened with changing colors. But Karluk knew this gay trap of old. He looked for the outline of the coral-colored, gaping shells upon which the gleaming mass reposed. It was a giant clam, almost as long as himself, with its great, sharp-edged shells wide open.

Karluk crouched motionless, studying the rock and the position of the plicated shells of the tridacna. He was so still and intent a wandering bonito came and nibbled at his exhaust and leered at him with a round lifeless eye. Karluk was reconstructing in his mind a scene he was certain this spot had witnessed in the not very distant past.

He had no doubt about it—the piece of hose in his hand, the jutting reef and the position of the great clam were convincing proof of the truth of the picture his imagination created. With John Tunnicliffe's gossip to aid him, he could even hazard a shrewd guess as to the identity of the chief actor and victim in the tragedy. Undoubtedly this piece of air-hose had been part of the equipment of the poor "Sydney bloke" who had lost life, " 'arness, 'ose and everything."

Karluk could not remember ever having seen a neater death-trap for an incautious or inexperienced diver. The Sydney bloke had, quite likely, crawled aft—even as Karluk was crawling aft—and, encountering the obstacle of coral, had carelessly rounded it or crawled over it without investigation. His trailing lines had fallen across the tridacna's open jaws; the giant shells had swung shut and severed the unfortunate man from the surface and from life.

Perhaps, thought Karluk, similiar accidents accounted for the balance of Tunnicliffe's grisly tale. Anyway, the clam would not trap him nor any future visitor to the *Pujarra* cabins. He would see to that.

He did see to it, promptly. He thrust out his bar and smartly rapped the underside of the shell. The bivalve closed its ponderous doors instantly. Then Karluk set about to pry it from its lodging-place.

But he did not try to lift it from its bed.

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Even his great strength, enormously increased though it was by the pressure and the leverage of the bar, would have found that task difficult, if not impossible. He pried free a huge chunk of the coral and gravity did the rest. The death-trap slid from sight, down by the side of the ship. Then Karluk continued his journey aft.

ANOTHER score of feet and he came to the saloon door. Its width and the cavernous interior made its identification easy and certain. It was in through this door he must pass to reach the door to Yat Pu's cabin.

He entered cautiously, swinging the investigating bar in a wide semicircle in front of him. He did not relish this part of the journey. It meant a right-angle turn to enter the saloon and another right-angle turn to enter the alleyway that led to his objective and still another turn to enter the room itself. He had come too far and had too long a length of lines connecting him with safety to care to risk a tangle.

He discovered that, though the wreck rested upon almost even keel, the tides and currents had jammed a great heap of furniture débris against the starboard wall of the saloon. This was dangerous to his lines, so he immediately moved toward the after-wall of the saloon. He followed this until he reached the alleyway that led to the cabin.

He paused here, debating with himself which course to follow; he might continue, he might return to the surface and rest and reduce his lines considerably by shifting the cutter some sixty feet, or he might return to the outer deck and with the crow-bar break through the wooden wall into Sin Yat Pu's presence. On the whole, he thought, the last course might be best; it would save time and, very likely, trouble.

While he pondered, there occurred an incident which illustrated graphically the wisdom of his caution and confirmed his choice of action. Karluk knew the wreck was alive with fish. Save the bonito and one lone crab he touched when he entered the saloon, he had seen none, for they kept beyond his short range of vision, but he could detect their flitting shadows. He paid no attention to them.

Even when a lordly jew-fish swam lazily up to the alleyway entrance and paused within arm's length and inspected him curiously, he paid little heed. He saw the fish was a big fellow—perhaps six, perhaps ten feet; he could not tell—but beyond the subconscious recognition of its presence he thought nothing about it.

But suddenly the water about him was surging and boiling, and leaning forward and peering out, Karluk saw the big fish was entrapped and struggling for its life. The commotion and the dreadful gloom baffled clear vision, but Karluk glimpsed enough to send him scuttling out of the saloon to the open deck. He had seen whitish bands encircling the body of the fighting fish, and it being drawn, quite evidently against its furious will, into the dark passage.

There was a cold sweat upon Karluk's face that was not due to condensation, and his scalp twitched nervously. He thought he knew what had happened to the jew-fish. Those whitish bands he had glimpsed encircling the thrashing body! A tentacle? The slimy, sucking arm of one of the murderous horrors of the deep?

Lucky it was the jew-fish and not he who paused in the alleyway entrance. He might have had a fight on his hands, and a fight with all that length of hose behind him would have been a life-and-death affair.

Karluk thought he had discovered what had ended Charley Topknot's career as a diver and what had sent poor Tom Blake to the surface a lunatic. They had doubtless ventured into the dark passage, to be welcomed by the ghastly, multi-armed embrace of the hideous thing that lurked at the passage end.

A cephalopod; an eight-armed devil-fish, or perhaps one of the even more terrible ten-armed squids of deep water! In the open, where there was room to move about and swing freely a knife-arm, Karluk did not fear the mollusks, no matter what their size; but then, these nightmarish submarine horrors seldom ventured into the open. They lurked in dark, narrow holes, like the cabin alleyway, and surprized their prey.

The one inside—it must be a big one, a giant squid, no doubt, for it had with its one tentacle overcome with ease the strength of a full-grown jew-fish! With what ease it might overcome the strength of a man; particularly in that narrow space where there was no fighting-room!

Karluk was sure he had happened upon the answer to the question John Tunnicliffe so emphatically propounded, "Wot's

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wrong with the *Pujarra?*" He knew. He knew also what had happened to the Chinese diver—a slimy death-embrace; a rending beak—and to poor Tom Blake. He knew what might have happened to himself. But for his luck! And the knowledge, despite his phlegmatic temperament, made him feel a bit sick. It was not a nice way to make a finish of things—in a squid's belly.

But Karluk was not the man to permit so common a thing as danger, either past or present, to interfere with the work to which he set his hand. He had come down to find the old Chinky, and find him he would, if all the cuttlefish and devil-fish in the belted seas had to be overcome or circumvented in the quest.

Besides, in the present instance, he thought all danger was past. He knew the habits of the cephalopoda too well to expect the shy inhabitant of the alleyway would leave his dark retreat and venture upon the open deck. It was a danger past, like the danger of the tridacna; a thing to be forgotten.

WITHOUT loss of time he set about locating the outside of the cabin which contained Sin Yat Pu's coffin. Nor was this difficult, for it was the very first room abaft the saloon, and the saloon door had been near the after-wall of that room. He stood as nearly erect as possible while breasting the current and walked along the wall, counting the port-holes. The third port-hole aft of the saloon door was the one he sought.

It was a large sixteen-inch port, tightly closed, and with the glass unbroken. Examining it, Karluk saw that if he broke the glass he would be able to pry out the brass ring and then, getting good purchase upon the ends of boards, rip out the wall with little difficulty. He broke the thick glass with the crowbar, using it as a lance.

When he had dislodged the ragged edges of the broken window he brought his helmet close to the opening and investigated the interior. He could not see more than a foot or two into the room, of course, but with the aid of the bar he could form a fairly good idea of its contents.

Indeed, at almost his first prod the end of the bar struck against a hard, metallic surface. Yat Pu, he was sure. With his next thrust he touched something soft and yielding, and the feel of the thing touched ran from the iron into his hand and gave him a thrill of disgusted horror.

Before he could withdraw the bar through the port, it was wrested from his grasp, and almost coincidentally a current of water washed out of the hole against him, as the moving body within the room displaced it; and there surged slowly up into his ken, first a whitish mass and then an enormous lidless, inky eye.

Karluk stared fascinated, powerless for the instant to move. The eye hung poised, framed in the port-hole, and returned his stare with a glare so baleful, so merciless and inhuman, that his heart seemed to stop beating from the horrid menace of it. The eye was monstrous, an unimaginable thing of the pit; it was so large it filled the opening, a black moon, all pupil, glowing with deep and evil fires.

It was no more than a foot from his head; Karluk might have dashed his fist through the port and struck it. But his thought was flight, not fight. For perhaps the count of five he endured that awful scrutiny; then the eye suddenly sank from view, and Karluk, the spell broken, backed hurriedly away, reaching, as he moved, for the heavy knife at his hip.

He moved quickly, aided in his going by the rushing current; but he did not move quickly enough to avoid a brush with the owner of the eye.

He had stepped from view of the port-hole, but the tapered tentacle of the thing inside came writhing after him with the speed of lightning. It curved out of the greenish darkness and touched the lead upon his breast and curled about the warding arm he threw out.

Where it touched it stuck, and Karluk could instantly feel the many small claws within the suction-disks commencing to chew upon the rubber of his suit. But his right arm was free and weaponed. Side-stepping as he struck, he brought the heavy blade up with a sweep, and at arm's length sliced through the soft, boneless flesh as if it were butter.

The arm went curling by him, seemingly unmindful of its amputated tip; and Karluk, losing sight of it, crouched against the cabin wall and waited, on the alert. He hesitated to move lest the disturbed water telegraph his whereabouts to the searcher.

Presently he saw the writhing arm again. It had swollen to gigantic dimension, as

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thick as his thigh, with suction-discs like saucers. Karluk was aghast at the size. This was, he knew, the inner portion of the creature's tentacle, close to its maw.

Its thickness explained why no companion tentacle had come in pursuit; there was not room for two such arms in the port-hole. He might have easily sliced through the viscous mass, but it was not his intent to betray his presence. He remained frozen in his attitude and watched the arm being withdrawn. It overhauled before his eyes like some tapering cable.

He estimated its length at between thirty and forty feet. The size of the creature to whom the arm belonged—a squid, he was now certain—he could not estimate. He had never seen one large enough to possess such a tentacle. He knew that awful body must nearly fill Sin Yat Pu's stateroom; quite likely it did fill it, and its numerous arms overflowed into the passage-way down which the jew-fish had been drawn.

When the mutilated end of the arm disappeared from view, Karluk waited a full ten minutes before moving. But at last he felt assured the arm had really withdrawn indoors, and he beat a stealthy and rapid retreat from the dangerous spot.

He signaled Mario to haul his lines taut and backed away from the vicinity of the stateroom with his knife ready. When he was sure he was past the reach of the enemy he turned and scuttled full speed down the deck; and when he reached the spot where his lines came aboard he lost no time in beginning his ascent.

In his haste to reach the surface he neglected to rest a sufficient length of time at the different levels to accustom his body to the changing pressure; and when he emerged into the blessed sunlight and Mario unbolted and lifted his helmet, Karluk's heart was thumping like a bass drum, and the blood was trickling from his nose and ears.

HE FLOPPED heavily over the rail and dragged his weighted feet across the deck to the hatch where the Chinamen were sitting, and himself sat down to rest. For the moment he was deaf to the excited words the younger Monogolian was hurling at him. But soon the thrumming inside his head stopped, and he gave ear and answer to Sin Lu Wong.

"Did you find him? Did you find him?" the tong leader was exclaiming.

Karluk glanced at the older Chinaman. The great Sin Wah Kee had doffed his mask of impersonality. In his interest he had straightened his back and was sitting bolt upright, his little eyes full upon Karluk and bright with expectancy.

"*Ja*, I find him," said Karluk.

Sin Lu Wong gave a gratified and commendatory grunt. Then he spoke rapidly in Chinese to his elder; and the latter, withdrawing his gaze from the diver, resumed his meditations.

"You bling him up bimeby?" pursued Sin Lu Wong.

"Bimeby," promised Karluk. Then he added, as an afterthought, "There ban somebody else down there."

"Eh? What?" exclaimed the other.

"A devil ban sitting on the old Chinky's coffin," continued Karluk.

An expression of consternation was visible upon Lu Wong's fat face; and the aged headman's glittering eyes fastened themselves upon Karluk so promptly, the latter immediately corrected his belief that Sin Wah Kee knew no English. The attitude of his auditors showed they were disconcerted but not surprized, and Karluk suddenly realized the real point of the Guy Fawkes celebration of the morning. He was amused.

"The devil is not a ghost," he exclaimed. "It ban a big squid; my word, bigger than this cutter, more than half as big as your old yunk. Squid—you savvy squid? You Chinks eat them."

Relief was immediately visible in both yellow faces and in Sin Lu Wong's voice.

"Oh—squid!" he said, with fine contempt. "I thought you meant a real— But, of course, we flightened them away!"

"It ban a real enough devil for me," observed Karluk grimly. "It scoffed one feller you sent down and made another feller balmy, and if I vas not so lucky it would have got me."

"But, Captain Ka'luk, you will not stop work because of a squid?" demanded Sin Lu Wong anxiously. "You will bling up the coffin?"

"I t'ink I bring it up," assented Karluk. "I vant that money and I ban a lucky feller. I vill fix that —— squid!"

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TWO hours later Karluk was ready to go down again. He had shifted his craft's mooring until she lay, he reckoned, almost directly above Sin Yat Pu's cabin. He had constructed his offensive weapon against the living occupant of the cabin—four sticks of fifty per cent. giant-powder, capped and wired and deftly fashioned into a water-proof bomb by the use of tin and solder and oiled tape.

He had emerged victorious from a hot argument with Sin Lu Wong concerning the use of the bomb.

"Bleak open coffin; no pay!" was the fiat.

"Break open the squid or there ban no coffin hoisted;" was the retort.

And the mummy on the hatch decided for Karluk with a muttered monosyllable. So Karluk stood again upon the diver's ladder and had Mario bolt his helmet to his shoulders.

He carried the bomb attached to the end of a light iron rod some six feet in length. The wires which would conduct the detonating spark were coiled down for running upon the deck beside the similarly coiled lines of his harness; the battery which would generate the spark stood beside the coil, but the wires were not connected.

Karluk's last command to Mario, before the helmet shut him off from talk, was to abstain himself and keep others from touching the wires while he, Karluk, was below.

"When I koom up I vill touch her off mineself," said Karluk.

As before, he landed upon the *Pujarra's* boat-deck. He did not need to tarry there this time; he knew his ground. Holding his burden free from contact, he slid over the edge of the deck and dropped lightly to the deck below.

A moment's work acquainted him with his locality. He was aft of the saloon door, but not quite as far aft as the lair. Crouching against the wall, he moved slowly toward the broken port, knife on guard and bomb extended before him. As soon as the hole became visible, he stopped—he had no wish to peer indoors this time—and reached toward the opening with the loaded rod.

There was no sign of the squid. But as soon as the bomb passed through the hole Karluk felt it touched lightly, as if by an inquisitive finger; and then, before he could even open his hand to let go, the rod was torn from his grasp.

Karluk stood not upon the order of his going. He hurled himself across the deck, tugging strongly on his life-line the signal to be hoisted. The response above was immediate. He cleared the rail.

Then it seemed as if the pressure was suddenly lifted from him and that the water all about was receding, and he, himself, sky-rocketing for the surface. An instant later, before he had hardly sensed what was happening, the sea had closed in and was squeezing him and a giant force was whirling him this way and that, to end by standing him upon his head.

With his diver's instinct he kept tight hold of the life-line throughout the flurry, so he was able to right himself with little difficulty. The water about him was discolored and agitated. Freshly loosened boards, on their way to the surface, struck against his legs and back. He was bruised and breathless and angry; and as before, he rose to the surface with reckless haste.

"I told you not to touch the vires!" he cried angrily, as soon as his helmet was removed. "By Yimminy, you blow me oop!"

The surprize and concern in the Manilaman's face was convincing proof of innocence.

"No touch heem!" he declared.

Karluk leaned over and examined the wires and the battery. It was as Mario said. The wires had not been connected or the battery used. Karluk sat down to puzzle out the mystery.

After a moment he began to chuckle. Then, as the full force of the situation smote his mind he lay back on the deck and roared and rolled with laughter. It was a joke after Karluk's heart.

When the paroxysm was past and he had wiped his eyes and found his voice, he enlightened the astounded and expectant Chinamen.

"What you t'ink—that feller down there scoffed the powder," he explained. "He ban too hungry to vait until I koom up and touch it off. He do it himself. What a —— fool!"

The men of Sin received the intelligence with exasperating gravity.

"But what of Yat Pu?" inquired Sin Lu Wong anxiously.

Karluk snorted disgustedly.

"You fellers ban like voomans; you haven't got sense to see a yoke!" he complained.

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Sin Lu Wong smiled an apology.

"It is not a Chinese joke," he said. "We are worried about our kinsman. If his coffin is exploded——"

"The old Chinky ban all right, Ay t'ink," broke in Karluk gruffly. "By and by I vill go down and get him. But first I rest."

KARLUK was very tired, and he lay down beneath the poop awning and immediately went to sleep. The two dignitaries of the Sin clan seemed not overpleased by the delay, but they forbore to oppose the will of their employee.

They returned on board the junk, after leaving instructions with Mario to signal them when his master was ready for a fresh descent. This was not until late in the day, for Karluk napped away the hours until the sun was low.

When he did step off the ladder again he carried below with him all the equipment necessary to the salvage of the coffin—the end of a three-quarter-inch Manila rope, which was roved through a block at the masthead, and a new crowbar.

He also carried down the anxious blessing of the Sin leaders, who at the signal had come in haste to be present at the salvage; and the comfortable assurance in his own mind that the danger of the green darkness was without doubt eliminated. For upon awakening, Mario had shown him a ragged length of squid-tentacle which had floated to the surface during the afternoon.

He found additional and complete proof of this as soon as he landed. He boarded the wreck this time upon her cabin-deck, directly opposite his objective. The deck was alive with scuttling sea-scavengers; his leaden feet crunched upon their hard shells. When he drew near he saw that the explosion had wrecked the wall of the cabin, and the squid's flesh oozed through a great jagged hole. Crabs were feasting upon it.

Karluk ripped and hammered the splintered wood and, the great weight on the other side aiding, the whole wall suddenly gave way, and the whitish, slimy bulk flowed out upon the deck and spread about his feet like an immense jelly. It was the monster's body, rendered a shapeless mass by his powerful pill. The face, with its dreadful maw and awful eyes, was quite obliterated. The sac-like body was riven, and of such enormous size that Karluk could only gape and wonder how the hideous bulk could have been compressed within the limits of the room.

Indeed, the room was not yet clear; it was well-nigh filled by the ten snakish arms of his vanquished foe. He had to chop through the mass of tentacle to reach the object of his search.

He found it at last, jammed in the far corner and almost buried beneath the flesh whose mere feel gave him the creeps. He pried it free of its obscene mantle with hasty, vigorous muscles and shunted it out on deck.

Here upon a carpet of the same repellent substance he paused long enough to examine his prize with eye and hand. The container of Yat Pu, ex-headman of Sin, seemed undamaged by either explosion or immersion. It was an oblong metal box with its top solder-sealed; and there were deep scratches on the iron surface that were, he was sure, placed there by the beak of the baffled squid.

So much Karluk paused to ascertain; then, feeling that his money was as good as in his pocket, he slung the coffin with the gant-line, hoisted it clear of the rail and gave the signal to hoist away.

Hardly had he cleared the ship when an ominous shadow flashed by his head, to be followed by a second and a third. Karluk grinned tolerantly. The shadows were sharks, come to the banquet prepared for them.

The coffin was lifted immediately to the surface, but Karluk made a slower ascent; the need for haste was past, and he could conserve his health and strength. When at last he broke through the water he saw that the crew of the junk's dingey, aided by Sin Lu Wong's own lordly hands, were just swinging the metal box inboard. By the time he had reached the deck and been divested of his hampering harness, the great Sin Yat Pu reposed upon the hatch and the two living tong chieftains chattered triumphantly over his indifferent form.

Karluk bent over the box with the others. He was exhilarated by the sight of his completed task; he was also surprized and amused by the demeanor of the yellow men. He had expected Lu Wong to express visibly and audibly his jubilation, for he was a noisy, gossipy man; but he had not looked for animated interest on the part of the aged and reserved Wah Kee.

He had not thought there was that much

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life left in the shrunken, tottering body. But Sin Wah Kee was the more vociferous of the two. His voice caroled a singsong, quavering chant of triumph, and he shuffled light-footedly around the box, feeling of its upper edges with his talon-like hands, which for the first time appeared outside his long silken sleeves.

"Your old Chinky ban all right?" demanded Karluk jovially.

"Velly fine," assured Sin Lu Wong. "You did not explode him; the top is tight and he is not injured. We have gained much face—we Sins'."

"You pay full price for the old feller?" hinted Karluk.

"Full plice," agreed the other promptly. "Just as soon as we get home."

Sin Wah Kee paused in his examination, with one of his long bony hands flat upon the coffin-top, and addressed his inferior.

"He says you are a child of good fortune," translated the younger Chinaman.

"*Ja*, I ban pretty lucky," agreed Karluk. He regarded the long box with complacent satisfaction. Quite by accident his gaze fell upon the old Chinaman's hand and centered upon a ring that encircled a skinny finger. His eyes widened and he bit his lip to restrain an exclamation. After a moment he remarked casually:

"When I get my money I vill buy me a watch—and a ring like that. Where ban you catch him that ring; hey, old feller?"

A quick glance passed between the two Chinese. Then Sin Lu Wong laughed.

"You can get the watch—I'll sell it to you," he said. "But the ling—you can not buy that. It is the Sin family ling; there is just that one."

"I t'ink I like a diamond better anyway," commented Karluk.

IT WAS late afternoon when the cutter and the junk let go their respective anchors off Thursday Island beach. By the time the salvaged box was landed, and amid the noisy respect of the assembled clan paraded into Sin Lu Wong's domicile, the dusk had arrived and with it dinner-time.

Karluk, standing upon Sin Lu Wong's veranda, feeling with caressing hand the crisp bank-notes in his pocket, decided he would go to McInerney's Hotel for a gentleman's meal; and also, if his man dropped in, to discuss the purchase of the ketch.

A little later, as he dined in solitary state, he heard his name called. Looking up, he saw the smiling, friendly face of Inspector Carmac of the West Australia Mounted. Carmac had just entered the room in company with a younger edition of himself, who wore a sub-inspector's uniform of the district police.

"Hello, Karluk! Treating yourself to the frills, eh?" was his jovial greeting. "Must have found another pearl. Bet you don't keep it!"

Karluk grinned. He was above feeling the banter tonight, with the price of a prime vessel in his coat pocket.

"I want you to meet my bother, Bob; he's sub in this district," continued Carmac. "Bob, this is Captain Karluk, from the West—the champion hard-luck man in all Australia. 'Hardluck' Karluk—that's his name. Eh, Karluk?"

Karluk acknowledged the introduction with a smile and handclasp, remarked carelessly that if the gentlemen would honor him he would be delighted to shout any wet they fancied, from champagne to "she-oak." Quite as carelessly he drew a handful of ten-pound notes from his pocket.

"That doesn't look like hard luck," commented the younger brother as he took a chair. "Believe I'll have a shandygaff."

"By George, it *is* another pearl!" exclaimed the other. "And the man has actually sold it and got his money!"

"No; I have changed my business," countered Karluk with heavy jocularity. "I ban a body-snatcher now. Lots of money."

"Eh?" exclaimed both policemen.

"Sin Lu Wong hired me to go down to the wreck of the *Puyarra* after an old dead Chinky named Yat Pu, who ban the head of his family," explained Karluk. "He paid big."

"Yat Pu?" said Inspector Carmac. "Not old Yat Pu of Sydney, the head of the Sin tong? Why, he can't be dead."

"Ban at the bottom of the Straits more than t'ree months," answered Karluk. "In a big iron box. Died in Sydney, and they ban shipping him."

"Three months!" echoed Carmac. "Why—nonsense! It's hardly a month ago that I talked to old Sin Yat Pu. Know the old scoundrel well; he raised Cain in my district when I was in the gold-fields. I saw him alive and well in the chief's office in Sydney,

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where he was being raked over the coals for some opium or gambling mess."

"Vell, anyhow, I brought up a dead Chinky," insisted Karluk. "I turned him over to Lu Wong and another old feller called Sin Wah Kee, who, Lu Wong says, ban the boss feller of his tong. And I have something to tell you about this old feller.

"You remember that snake ring Peter Strakopapolous wore on his hand? Well, this Chinky, Sin Wah Kee, has one yust like it. It surprized me, because I never saw one except on Peter's hand, and Peter told me he got the t'ing in India. But this old Chinky wears one yust like it, and Lu Wong says it ban the family ring."

"He was spoofing you," declared Carmac. "I remember that ring the Greek wore very well. It was unique and obviously Hindu, a hooded cobra wrought in detail. Nothing Chinese about it. And you say this old duffer is wearing it? Well—interesting—very interesting! Now I wonder."

What he wondered Inspector Carmac did not put into words. Instead he fell into a brown study for several minutes. Then he addressed his brother:

"Rather queer—what? What do you think about it?"

"Probably nothing in it," replied the sub-inspector. "But I confess I am very anxious to discover some excuse for cleaning out the Sin nest. The beggars are a bally nuisance in this district. I think we should look into it a bit."

Nothing more was said of the matter. The talk progressed to other topics, and, when he had finished his meal, Karluk excused himself and descended upon the man who wanted to sell his ketch, and who had entered the bar shortly before. The two police officials left the house.

An hour later his discussion of terms was rudely interrupted by a puffing, red-faced constable.

"Are ye the bloke known as Hardluck Karluk?" demanded this worthy. "Well, me man, ye are wanted at oncet in a 'urry down at Lu Wong's Chink 'otel. The sub an' his brother sent me after you. 'Tell 'im to come immediate!' says they."

WHEN he reached Sin Lu Wong's establishment Karluk discovered it to be in the complete possession of the district police. A constable patrolled the grounds, another guarded the entrance, and in the big gambling-room, through which he was conducted, the pie-gow and fan-tan games were silent and a sullen mob of coolies were herded under guard against the wall. His guide led him past the bar and into a room he had not yet visited during his trip to the house.

The two Carmacs were in the room; so were Sin Lu Wong and Sin Wah Kee; and the coffin Karluk had risked his life to salvage stood in the center of the room upon two wooden horses. A gasoline torch sat upon the top of the box, blazing noisily.

"You were right about the ring, Karluk," the elder Carmac greeted him.

He held out his hand and displayed the golden snake.

"'Tis Peter's ring, I'll swear, and it was never made in China.

"But you were wrong in the other instance. That's why I sent for you. I want you to identify this old ruffian. Now tell me, of your own knowledge, what are the names of these Chinese?"

Karluk looked at the blank, disinterested faces of the two Chinamen. They were sitting together in the corner of the room farthest removed from the door, and a uniformed guard hovered near them. They seemed not in the least affected by their predicament. Neither gave Karluk so much as a glance of recognition.

He complied with the inspector's request.

"Sin Lu Wong, the fat one," he said, "and the old feller is Sin Wah Kee, and the dead Chinky, Sin Yat Pu, ban in that box."

"Oh, but is he?" exclaimed Inspector Carmac. "Then he's double, by Jove! Because this old rascal, Sin Wah—my grandmother—has been calling himself Yat Pu for the last fifteen years to my certain knowledge."

"Then who ban in the box?" Karluk wanted to know.

"That is what we intend to find out," said Carmac. "When we raided in here a half-hour ago we discovered [illegible] beauties alone in this room, and was engaged in the task of [illegible] solder that holds the top to the box. Suppose he wanted who was in the box too, eh?"

Sin Lu Wong broke silence.

"A kinsman is in that box. light to touch it: you have no in here without the court s[illegible] go to law. I [illegible] id you to

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"Forbid away," Carmac told him. Then turning to his brother he added, "Go ahead, Bob; open her up."

Sin Lu Wong subsided, and the sub-inspector picked up the torch and applied the flame to the upper edge of the box. After a time he set the torch upon the floor and nodded to his brother. Carmac took hold of the top of the lid, his brother of the bottom, and together they lifted it free of the coffin. The evil smell of death immediately filled the room.

The two officials stared into the box, and the elder nodded his head vigorously and exclaimed:

"I thought so! I thought so!"

Then he beckoned to Karluk to approach.

"Take a look!" he commanded.

Karluk approached and looked down. He saw the dead body of Peter Strakopapolous, the Greek pearl-buyer, stretched out in the zinc-lined interior. The body, due to the air-tight receptacle, was unspotted by decay, and an expression of mingled pain and terror was even visible in the features. The lips were drawn in a snarl. The head lolled back and exposed the fat throat. Exposed also the way of death, for a silken cord encircled the neck so tightly the overlapping flesh almost concealed it.

Karluk looked and swore angrily. Peter Strakopapolous had been a pleasant, friendly man, and Karluk had liked him. But Carmac, the elder, looked into the box with professional eyes, his policeman's instinct uppermost.

"I suspected as much," he stated. "It was quite obvious from the ring and the deception the old villain practised. But—why—why?"

He wheeled upon the Chinese.

"What is the answer?" he demanded of them. "Why did you do it?"

Sin Lu Wong and Sin Yat Pu regarded [illegible] silence.

beach. By [illegible]eturned to the coffin and resur-
landed, and [illegible]ody. Suddenly he exclaimed—
assembled [illegible] that in his hand?"
domicile, th[illegible]ced the Greek's hands then.
dinner-time. [illegible]lded upon his chest; one of

Karluk, st[illegible]ched, and a piece of chamois-
veranda, feel[illegible]ough the fingers. Carmac
crisp bank-no[illegible]e hand and held up a little
would go to M[illegible] bag. He inverted the bag
man's meal; a[illegible]nd then held out the hand
in, to discuss th[illegible]

"Yes; here is the answer!" he said.

"By George!" cried the sub-inspector.

For an instant Karluk could not say anything. He could only gape in open-mouthed amazement. When he did speak it was in a half-coherent bellow.

"By Yimminy, it—it ban mine pearl!"

NEXT morning, in the police-station the mystery was unraveled for Karluk.

"Lu Wong has decided to lose face and save his greasy neck," said Inspector Carmac. "He gave us a confession."

"And the Chinkies tried to sell Peter my pearl, and he knew it?" said Karluk.

"No, we were wrong about Peter," replied Carmac sadly. "It was Peter who robbed you. The Chinaman says that Peter staged the whole affair. He had a confederate—one of the Sin clan, of course—in the water outside the port-hole of your cabin; and he signaled him with a match when the moment was ripe. The chap just reached in and nipped the jewel.

"He turned it over to Peter, and Peter went down to Sydney with it. He quarreled with Yat Pu, the head of the Sin tong, over the division of the loot, and Yat Pu had him strangled. Then in order to hide the murder from any possible discovery and at the same time get the pearl safely out of the country, old Yat Pu concocted and put through this scheme of shipping a dead Chinaman home. Clever—what?

"But the ship sunk, and they were put to it to dive for their ill-gotten property. Seems they had bad luck. They are a superstitious lot, these Cantonese; Lu Wong told me that Peter's ghost was haunting the wreck and avenging himself on the divers.

"Then you came along, Karluk, and their problem was solved. These tong-men have a sense of right and wrong, though it works rather queerly with them. Lu Wong told me that he was sure you would be successful where others had failed because it was your own property you were diving for and Peter's ghost would be afraid of you.

He also said that engaging you was playing a nice Chinese joke because you would allow yourself to be robbed for the second time and not know anything about it. A nice sense of humor—what?

"You did it, too; and you never would have known anything about it—nor would any other white man—if it hadn't been for

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old Yat Pu's greed in stealing Peter's ring and his vanity in wearing it. Pure luck, eh? You certainly are a lucky man, Karluk!"

Karluk agreed. The words were music. He was in a daze of delight.

"Here is your pearl," said the sub-inspector. "We do not need it any longer—now we have the confession."

He brought the jewel from the office strong-box and put it into Karluk's hand.

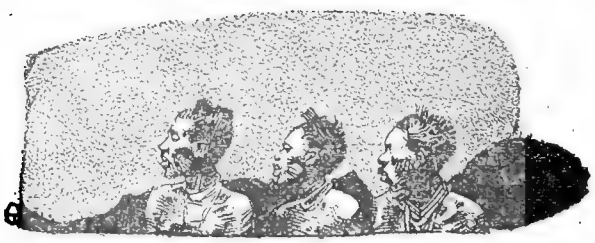
"By George, it is a beauty!" he said as he parted with it.

"Too beautiful," commented the inspector. "I hate big gems. There was never one turned loose upon the world that didn't cause more crime and misery than its beauty was worth. The devil makes them. Still, it is our business to try and take care of them. I suppose I needn't advise you, Karluk; with your luck I doubt if you could lose it again if you tried. You have certainly changed your name."

"I ban lucky," agreed Karluk.

He grinned blissfully and unbosomed himself.

"I have bought me a new wessel. I vill sail it to Broome and sell this pearl to mine friend, Colin Ramsay. Then men vill say, 'There goes "Lucky" Karluk!' "



Ibet

By Thomas Samson Miller

IS IT your *ibet* not to start off on a Friday, or to avoid the number thirteen, or has it been foretold of you that there is danger for you if you journey southward when the moon is on her back? That is *ibet*, and if you delve back into the primitive you will dig up such *ibets* galore. The negro, being nearer to the primitive than the Caucasian, is loaded down with *ibets*, which may take of the nature of hoodoos, voodoos and such.

If you want to understand the negro of America seek him out in the primitive on the Slave Coast, see him in his villages on the Niger. Every West African has his one or more *ibets*, laid on him by fond parents at his birth. It may be his *ibet*, as in one case the writer knew, to eat only over water when on a journey. A common *ibet* among the Fantee blacks is not to eat meat and fish the same day, which, curiously, Steffensen reports as a superstition common among the Eskimo.

These *ibets* are burdensome things to drag through life. Take the case of the Senegambian who was forbidden to eat or drink when his shadow was behind him. Or that Fantee who was obliged to eat over water when on a journey. He had to tote a gourd of water, and pour it into a calabash and bend over it as he ate; had to tote that water through jungle and over desert, and however thirsty, he dared not drink it, for he would starve.

To disobey one's *ibet* is as full of danger as going under a ladder or spilling salt. The West African mission convert who gives up his *ibet* is looked on by his fellows as a very dissipated person and one who takes all kinds of foolish risks with the occult. The African makes a great secret of his *ibet*, lest an enemy get to know of it and trick him into breaking it.

Sometimes a whole tribe has the same *ibet*, which they keep secret under penalty of death to any who should divulge it, so it is not easy to learn these *ibets*, but if you are on the march and suddenly, for no apparent reason whatever, the blacks drop their head-loads and refuse to proceed or eat or stir for twenty-four hours, put it down to *ibet*. If on certain days your "boy" refuses to talk, don't get mad; just put it down to *ibet*.

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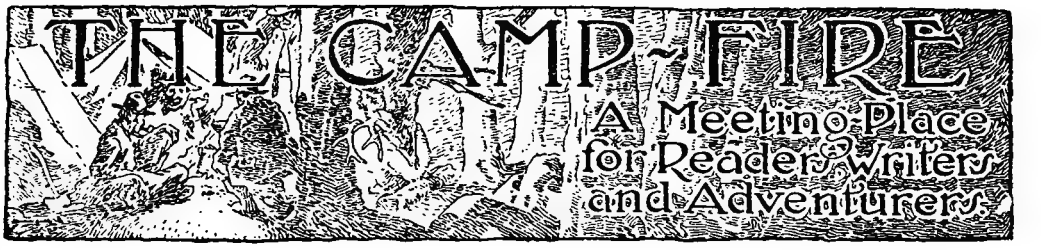

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

HERE'S something that takes us back to one of our issues of the Summer of 1919. Honest, I thought I'd passed this on to you before. Quite a lot of you came down on this mistake about dynamite. Talbot Mundy manfully holds up both hands and surrenders, but we here in the office also are responsible. We ought to have caught this point ourselves. Trouble is there are so blamed many things we don't know. Figure how many fields and subjects enter into our magazine's stories and then figure what a wise guy it would take to be an expert in all those lines. There ain't no such animal. Doubtless many could do it better than we do it, but it's no easy job for any one, so be easy on us.

First is one of the many letters that came in on this point. Then Mr. Mundy's letter. Mr. Mundy, by the way, is just recently back from most of a year in Palestine and Arabia, and that locality just now is about as good a place for real adventures as any one could ask. A fellow can get shot up almost any time he wants to and without much, if any, trouble on his part.

Incidentally, while Talbot Mundy was over there some one impersonated him in New Orleans to the sorrow of quite a few people down there.

San Francisco, California.

I have just finished reading "The Shriek of Dûm," by Talbot Mundy. Mr. Mundy is very entertaining, but when he takes up subjects that he does not know and his reader does, then all the beautiful illusion is destroyed. I refer to the peculiar properties ascribed to the dynamite in the story mentioned. If dynamite really possessed these properties the mining fraternity would have long ago lost many of its present brightest luminaries.

Dynamite may be dropped on the floor with impunity, it may even be tramped on with hobnail boots, or thrown to a distance and under ordinary conditions used as a target or placed on an anvil and struck with a hammer (I do not recommend this as a healthful pursuit as the thousandth case might come at the wrong end of the series), or burned, or used in most any way except as a food, all without serious danger. Ten holes in a 5 x 7 breast may be loaded with it and fuses and caps properly attached and fired and the tenth hole may not explode although the other nine do.

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The next time Mr. Mundy's characters use dynamite, for heaven's sake have them take a little fuse and a few caps along or at least a few caps to give a poor miner's imagination something to work on.

Mercury fulminate or nitro glycerine might do in default of dynamite, but I am afraid the inspectors would not let his characters pack it around in fifty-pound boxes.—A. GRAY.

New York City.

Dear Hoffman—No wonder dynamite is up for discussion! *Adventure's* readers surely have caught me with the goods. Dynamite will not explode when thrown, unless something is first attached to do the needful detonating.

What shall I do? I propose that, rather than pile denunication on a contributor of these years' standing, who is now unfortunately sitting on the horns of his dilemma, you should offer to your readers a year's free subscription (at my expense) as prize for the best excuse that I can give under the circumstances; also an autographed copy of my last book ("The Ivory Trail") to any reader who can invent an explanation—the latter, of course, outweighing all excuses always.

Anyhow, I surely won't ever make that particular mistake again.—TALBOT MUNDY.

I WONDER sometimes, when some of you write in about the mistakes of writers and wax sarcastic and even venomous, whether you realize how many mistakes writers do *not* make. Out of several million chances per story their batting-average is pretty good to say the least. And I wonder whether those who write from such superior heights are as perfect in their own special lines as they expect writers to be in theirs. By all means call out every time you catch one of our writers or us in a mistake. That helps make a better magazine. But act human, fellows, act human.

Same for us poor editors, but we're sort of used to it. Part of any editor's job. However, even after many years of it, I confess I get hot under the collar when every once in a while some one writes in and devotes his letter not to pointing out a mistake but chiefly to seeing how nasty he can be while doing it. Any —— fool can be nasty about anything. But why be a —— fool?

This, of course, has no reference to the letter above and, most of all, I owe it to you readers in general to state that the nasty type is the rare exception in the case of this magazine. I've served on half a dozen others and I realize very fully that the readers of our magazine are a particularly friendly bunch—and .45 caliber instead of .22 short.

But as the years go on, I'm getting tired of these stray cases. I think some time I'll pick out one of those smart-aleck letters, pass it on for you to look at and then, since the smart-aleck has had a chance to voice his side of things, ask you for a chance to state mine—in full—and without reservation. In other words, I'd like the privilege of being a —— fool myself.

A WORD from Charles Beadle about his novelette in this issue. Also something of interest in connection with one of his former stories in our magazine:

Paris, France.

The source of the story is obvious to any one who happens to recollect the short Camp-Fire discussion about Phenician ruins in Rhodesia. I had had the nucleus of the idea in my head for some while but that kind of stirred it up, fertilized it as it were.

By the way, came across an item to-day that weirdly enough corroborates the possibility of the Alabaster Goddess and the Bowl of Alabaster. It is a report of an expedition which has just been completed through the very corner near the Gamballa-galla or Ruenzori range of mountains. I quote:

"From Kigezi the expedition set out for Banyoro . . . but instead of retracing its steps struck out a new route moving westward . . . turned northward and followed the line of these lakes and Albert Lake. Some of the scenery in this little known country . . . was found to be beautiful beyond description, comprising crater lakes surrounded by tropical vegetation of wonderful luxuriance. *The people, cut off from the world live happily in ignorance of their fellows a few miles distant.* In this African Arcadia . . . met the Bakunta, the descendants of a few Baganda who many years ago killed a prince in battle and fled their country to escape the avengers of blood."—Man. June, 1920, The Mackie Ethnological Expedition to Central Africa.—CHARLES BEADLE.

OTHER old-timers please note. Here's another of you who realizes that as a real comrade at our Camp-Fire it is up to him to talk as well as listen, to give as well as take. I wish our paper permitted the reproduction of the interesting photographs Mr. Thomason sent in. Also I hope he'll give us some more beans.

Bryson City, N. C.

Your remarks at an earlier Camp-Fire anent the "common bean bag" made me feel real small and set me to thinking about things in a different light. I have long been a silent reader of *Adventure*, and I always turn eagerly to the Camp-Fire section and devour that first of all.

I AM a rover by trade and choice, and I intensely enjoy reading the letters of the Camp-Fire members. It has been in my mind for long to contribute some beans to the community bag, but you know how it is with one who is only a "respectful worshiper at a distance—" I just didn't do it. But I come now and ask a place among the comrades at the Camp-Fire's side, and, before I offer

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anything in the way of beans, please let me ask if any comrade has any knowledge of a former member of the Jesse James band of desperadoes, named Ralph Henry Clark.

Here are some photos of Clark. The one with the girls at his side was taken here at Bryson City, N. C., and he said the other was taken when he was captain of a ship of some sort running out of Rio de Janeiro.

I HAVE happened on to the place where this man spent his last years, here at Bryson City, North Carolina. Clark came here about 1900, and died here recently. Through this little mountain village right in the "Heart of the Blue Ridge," runs the Tuck-a-see-gee River, and, just above the last houses at the riverside, is an island in the middle of the river. This island is several acres in extent and is covered by a dense growth of trees and underbrush. In a little shack on this island, Clark lived out the last days of his eventful life.

The shack is so well hidden by the trees and brush that one might pass within a few yards of it and not see the building. A photo of the shack is also inclosed.

Clark was an old remnant of a man; minus one arm, and one leg was badly distorted and shortened from some terrible wound he had received. This leg was "pieced out" with a sort of an iron contrivance, and, in consequence, he was known here as "Old Iron Foot."

His body, from the crown of his head to his feet, was a mass of bullet and knife wounds, and he was a living example of the remarkable vitality some men possess.

CLARK was a very short man, dark complexioned, with snappy black eyes, black hair and mustache, and he claimed to be a native of Nova Scotia and had attended some college in Maine. Evidently he had followed the sea at one time. He always dressed neatly and appeared cleanly.

He "made no bones" about his former connections with the James boys and at the time of Frank James' death Clark received a letter from some person, giving in detail the funeral ceremonies and the names of the pall-bearers. At times he would talk freely of his adventures with the James boys.

He was a member of Colonel Roosevelt's command at San Juan Hill, and was demobilized at Chattanooga, Tennessee, or so it is said.

Once, when he was sick here, the doctors removed four large leaden bullets from his right hip. These he said he had carried for thirty years.

After his death here, his effects were destroyed, and the inclosed photographs are the only things left to perpetuate his memory.

All good wishes for you all.—W. W. THOMASON.

SOME time ago Chas. B. McCafferty of Arlington, Texas, asked Camp-Fire to supply the missing verses of the poem "Sam Bass." A number of you replied, and I've sent the verses to Mr. McCafferty. I'd have liked to publish them so all of you could have a look. But a problem enters in. If we print a poem in "Camp-Fire" it is likely to turn out that the poem was originally printed under the copyright of some other publisher, which would mean an infringement of his copyright by our magazine, making us liable to heavy damages.

It often happens that one of you asks for the words of some poem and that others of you supply them, and such a poem is usually of interest to most of us. Well, if when you send it in you can also give us the name of its publisher and copyright holder (they are not always the same), we can write and get permission to publish with credit to author and publisher. If you can't tell us the person from whom to get permission, or we don't happen to know ourselves, we can't print a poem.

USUALLY a publisher will grant permission gladly and without question, since most publishers are a fairly decent lot and since, they being given credit for the poem by us, there is some very good free advertising for the book or periodical in which the poem originally appeared. In one Camp-Fire case, however, a Boston publisher had the nerve to demand a cash payment for our use of a poem and his attitude disgusted me so that I wouldn't meet his terms. When a man asks to be paid for being advertised I can's see it. As a matter of fact, if any money changed hands on such a transaction it ought to be paid by the publisher for the advertising. Maybe I ought to have paid the small sum of fifteen dollars (though that seems an outrageous price in the circumstances) and let Camp-Fire have the poem, but I sort of figured most of you would have taken the same position I had against what looked like an unwarranted hold-up.

ONE of our comrades, J. L. Norton of Miami, Florida, sent in the following article from the *Miami Metropolis* of September 13, 1920. Things like this make us feel that even one such instance is enough to warrant running our "Lost Trails" department for years. When one considers the hundreds of people who have been brought together by the department, it makes that single page or part of a page look very big indeed.

As the result of the casual reading this morning by Sergeant H. L. Patch of the Miami police department of a back copy of the magazine *Adventure*, two brothers, both veterans of the world war who have long thought each other dead, will probably be

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reunited in the near future. They are Frank E. Beavers, who until recently was a member of the Miami police department, and William Benjamin Beavers of Chicago. The magazine was dated January, 1920.

MR. PATCH had just concluded an interesting story in the magazine when he turned quite casually to the back pages of the periodical and noticed a heading "Lost Trails," a department devoted by the magazine to aid veterans and relatives in locating each other.

Half way down the column Mr. Patch noticed a familiar name—that of Beavers—and reading with interest the little three-line notice, discovered that William Benjamin Beavers was trying to locate his brother, Frank E. Beavers.

Frank E. Beavers was upstairs in the municipal court at the time, as a witness in a case of reckless driving. Sergeant Patch lost no time in getting to him.

Mr. Beavers was so surprised for a minute that he could hardly speak. "Why, I got official notice from the Government," he declared, "while I was in France, that my brother 'Bill' had been killed in the St. Mihiel drive and I have since believed him to be dead, so made no effort to locate him. I shall sure wire him just as soon as I can get out of this court room."

The notice in the "Lost Trails" gave the Chicago address of William Benjamin Beavers.

Both brothers were in the infantry and saw considerable service overseas. Frank E. Beavers was a motorcycle disptach rider in the Twenty-sixth, the famous Yankee division.

THE Adventurers' Club of Chicago now occupies the entire building at 40 South Clark Street. They have a large membership and the data concerning their members makes a very interesting survey of the entire field of adventure the world over. Their secretary, Captain J. J. Franklin, writes in:

We should be very glad if you could mention in the magazine that we are always pleased to welcome any adventurers at our Club.

You will remember Captain Franklin as one of our "Ask Adventure" editors for Africa until the war called him into service and you'll be glad to know that we expect soon to have him with us again in that capacity, perhaps even before these words reach your eye.

DON'T forget that on January first we hold our semi-annual auction by mail of used *Adventure* covers. With the exception of those already disposed of, all the original paintings that have appeared as covers on the magazine in recent years will be sold to the highest bidders at that date. Send in your bid at any time. No bid of less than ten dollars per cover considered.

IT HAPPENED that one of you wrote in asking about an ant-bear's ability to do battle with a jaguar and that his letter reached us just after we had bought "Citizen Yurumi" which appears in this issue. To get still more testimony on this point, I put Mr. Ward's question up to Arthur O. Friel of our writer's brigade and here is his letter in answer:

I've noticed that when a chap asks such a question he likes to be referred to some disinterested authority for corroboration. Just as soon as I can get to it I can refer Mr. Ward to such an authority, quoting him text, chapter and verse; but in my present location I'm out of touch with such matters, and off-hand I can't even remember with certainty the name of the book or even of the naturalist himself.

Speaking in general, the ant-bear is not by any means a scrapper. I took pains to bring this out clearly in my "Ant-Eater" story. He is about as slow and inoffensive a brute as can be found, except his cousin the sloth—both these animals belong to the Edentata order of mammals. But when Mister Ant-Bear is up against it he is bad medicine. Clumsy, slow, misshapen—but armed with huge hooks which will rip up the ground, claw open tree-stumps, gut a dog or clamp into a jaguar's sides with equal deadliness. To depict him as a rushing hell-cat of the Georges Carpentier type would of course be wrong; but he sure can use his hooks in a death-grapple, and jam them home so hard that I don't want to be the guy who gets them.

With best regards to all.—ARTHUR O. FRIEL.

ANOTHER of our Old-Timers and one who has seen his full share of this little old round globe. His is one of the good letters that has been in our Camp-Fire cache some time—not because it wasn't as interesting as those used but just because there are an awful lot of letters in that cache and we don't pretend to handle them in sequence.

Sacramento, California.

I am going to introduce myself to Camp-Fire. I was born in 1857 hence am sixty-three years old. I have knocked around in—or shall I say on—this old globe from Vladivostok to Peking, Singapore to Manila, Melbourne and Sydney to other far corners of Australia besides well all over Canada and our good old U. S. A.

I HAVE seen some adventures on land and sea; have with my own hands dug the grave of my bunkie and left him to his last long sleep under a mimosa thorn bush in far-away Rhodesia where I'm sure he sleeps well, for he was a true adventurer and 'twas his last wish to be buried thus. He, my camp-mate of many years standing, was dearer to me than any other man, woman or child. We had shared our last crust together, our last drop of water and what more can I say? Above all he was my *friend*.

How true the words—"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for a friend."

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I READ with interest what Captain North has to say of his brother Major Frank North.

As a boy and young man, to be exact, from June '66 to August '80, I lived in Northwestern Kansas, Gove County. Have heard as a boy the lead fly when a gang of cowboys started in to "paint the town red." Grinnell was our nearest post-office.

Have met in person such men as Col. Cody, Capt. Jack Crawford, Capt. David L. Paine, and many others who helped populate and guard the old frontier. Was living in Grinnell when Col. John M. Forsyth and his scouts fought Roman Nose and his Northern Cheyenne warriors to a stand-still on the Arickaree Fork in Southeastern Colorado. Colorado then was a territory and, for judicial purposes, a county of Kansas. Was well acquainted with old Bill Stewart while he was sheriff of Colorado Co.

To come down to days of more recent date, was a member of crew of *S. S. Queen* when she burned at sea six hundred miles off Talamook Light on January 10th, '02. Was living in Frisco when the *Rio Janeiro* was sunk on Mile Rock on morning of Washington's birthday, 1902.

Living on Minna Street in Frisco at time of the quake and fire, 18th April, 1906, and for five days and nights thereafter camped in Jefferson Square and lived on army rations.—JAMES D. MOORE.

UNCLE FRANK HUSTON takes up a previous discussion about the various sections of our country and then talks about other things. He touches on controversial subjects, but, while we bar from our talks any subject that might stir up animosity among us, Uncle Frank is a privileged character and if he wants to controvert a little, as a privilege of his years, we sit and listen but we don't controvert back. Anyhow, what follows was in a personal letter to me and not intended to "start anything" except maybe with me, and it would take quite a little to make me start anything against Uncle Frank.

I haven't heard from him lately and some of my letters have failed to reach him and have come back unclaimed, but I know through Harriman and others that he's as far as Kansas on his way back to his West. He had to get back to it. This letter was written from Washington, D. C., where he'd been trying to get some of the kinks taken out of the red tape about some of his affairs.

Washington, D. C.

I agree with most that Mac. says with the exception of Florida. The real West commences, nowadays, about Council Bluffs, to the north, and at Brownsville, Texas, to the south; that is, as far as there is any West left, but he is right in saying the "old Western spirit" may be found at the Battery, the Bronx, Skowhegan, Savannah, Duluth or Detroit, and maybe even in Bawstin, though of that "I ha'e me doots."

NO ONE section has a monoply on true manhood and, I may add, no one race, though I, personally, believe that the Anglo-Saxon leads in that as in all progress and betterment of humanity in general. Yet that may be personal prejudice, though I reckon not, for in myself Latin and Gaelic meet on equal terms with the first named although —a long way back to be sure—with just a dash of the original inhabitants of this land, enough to make me see red at times and to fully and entirely sympathize with Sitting Bull's attitude toward the intruders in our mutual native land. Remember his answer when asked what the Indians thought of the treaty of '80?

"Indians," he stormed "There are No Indians left but me!" Emerson Hough feels that way, too, but thinly veils it with "lankwidge."

But, speaking in the concrete, the East is more hidebound than the West; "I mean to say," that they observe the conventions more and there is less open heartedness in the cities. Easily accounted for, as the struggle for existence is acuter, they can not become acquainted with one another, as where there is plenty space and fewer people, but as you both say, the heart, the intent, is there, like the vein of pay stuff, that needs simply to be sought and uncovered.

AGAIN, the "Western spirit" is merely heredity cropping out. Which needs a heap of explanatory footnotes. Briefly, pioneering brings out all the "help one another," because it is necsary in sparse communities. Get what I mean? They are really dependent on each other, and, like all else in nature, it grows and expands with use. In fact, the early days in the colonies had the same spirit, only they did not know it by that name.

But I must frankly acknowledge that in the East they judge a man by the coat he wears, and that is why they are such easy marks for the con-man and the frauds who pose as European nobles from time to time.

And I could fill an issue with exceptions to the rule, both as to East and West, that I have personally found, for on the whole folks is folks with hair and hide, the world over, and R. L. S. struck the ball with his "good in the bad, and bad in the good."

I SURE gotta go'n git me uh new typewriter ribbun, for this dawgawn one is like a battle riven standard for looks. Its condition is like the topmast of Marryat's man-o'-warsman— "somewhat precarious and not at all permanent." "But, 'twill serve, 'twill serve." At least until I get to go down town.

Just got a note from *Wuk Se, Onapa;* and, by the way, you may call——Buffalo Bull, which is, in Sioux, *Kalanka*, and——is "*Luta*," or "Red." They got together and mailed me a box of all the flora of the desert they could find, and also a letter, Injun style, that I could not read but will send you to see if you can decipher it, which I doubt, as it is a twig cut to express a message, a method common to the more northern tribes, but seldom used by the "buffalo Indians."

What a thing they have here that they call climate! Even when the sun do shine, it seems to be weeping. No wonder the Solons of the nation are all balled up, for the fog must strike in and cloud their think-tanks.

The squirrels here have learned my voice and come

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when I call them and climb all over and through me and paw my fingers apart to see if I am hiding anything there. The others feed 'em peanuts, but I sabe the burro and get walnuts and "sich like," which they prefer.

I LIKE what Wiggins says *re* the .45-70 take down, and the .45 Colt, but I like a 7½ inch barrel better than the 5½ for the belt, though the latter is just right for the shoulder. And here is some advice for the travellers. ALWAYS carry TWO guns, one in the belt in sight, and one in a shoulder holster, OUT OF SIGHT; under the coat or vest. And for this reason: if you "get in trouble," or some one gets the drop on you, you always have an ace up your sleeve. In the days of cap and ball revolvers, I always had one or more Derringers, in my vest or coat pockets.

You will be taken for a tenderfoot any way and therefore they wont look for more than the obvious, that on your hip; but oh, man, when they take that away and you spring a nice little "equalizer" up agin their belly and say, "My deal now!" it's like raking in a "jack" on "two pair or worse."

And always try for the solar plexus. Folks didn't have one in my day, but since their discovery, or invention, every one carries one just in what we used to call "right in the guts" and the more polite or squeamish ones termed the pit of the "stummick." A gent. hit with a 300 gr. bit of galena there generally says "WUNK" or "WUMPH," and takes no interest in the subsequent proceedings. I have heard "WOOP" or "WUP" used at times, but the result is the same whatever the remark.

For target and military purposes the small bore, high-power gun is of value, but the "knock 'em down" is the gun for game every time.

I like the .45-90, but it is not made take-down, and then every one can not stand the "push" after a few shots. But what most of the present day sports really need is a machine-gun. How many men to-day, at the one hundred and two hundred yards could take an old flintlock and "bark" squirrel? Dawgawn few I wot, guess or reckon. Yet I knew one man who did it often in the days of old.—UNCLE FRANK.

A BRIEF word from Garrard Harris concerning his story in this issue:

Birmingham, Ala.

The description of San Juancito is a combination of Livingston, Guatemala, and Bluefields, Nicaragua, and of course, there is no such republic as Amititlán—it is a town up in interior Guatemala.—GARRARD HARRIS.

WHO knows about the man who used to shoot the Lachine Rapids?

Dryden, Ontario, Canada.

Is there among the Camp-Fire readers some kind gentleman who will step forward and tell me the history of one half-breed who used to shoot the rapids of the St. Lawrence river. The Lachine Rapids near Montreal. It was in looking over the *Montreal Star* that I saw under the heading of "Twenty-Five Years Ago" a statement saying that on New Year's Day, I think it was, this half-breed had shot the Lachine rapids. If some one who knew him or about him will tell me I will be very much obliged.—JAMES THOMPSON, Box 6.

Shall We Do It?

AT PRESENT, with the paper shortage, deranged transportation facilities and other general conditions as they are, it's no time to talk definitely about what a magazine will do in the future. But supposing general conditions become normal, what shall we do with *Adventure?* We're asking you as its readers and buyers, for you are the ones to decide.

To put things modestly, our magazine has been doing very well, despite general conditions. Like any other publisher, The Ridgway Company naturally wants it to do better and better and to make as much money as possible. Same as in any business. But The Ridgway Company believes that it can't get without giving. And it believes very firmly that, whether it asks them or not, you readers are the ones who will give the final decision on any step taken by the magazine.

WE'VE tried to prove that we believe our own best profit lies in giving you as much and as good as we can. To take a recent instance, when the paper situation forced us against our will to cut down the number of pages we changed the size of the type so as to give you just as much reading matter as before. Then *Romance* was temporarily suspended and the paper pressure correspondingly relieved. Immediately we restored the full number of pages to *Adventure* and went back to the old and larger type. We could just as well have hung on to the fewer-paged size, for *only two* kicks came in to my desk (or any desk, so far as I know)and, believe me, saving that much paper these days is some item. But we didn't hang on to our advantage at your expense. You had stood by us when we were forced into the smaller size, had understood our necessity and acted altogether reasonably and in friendly fashion. Be sure we appreciate your attitude and we tried to show that we did by ordering, the minute we saw a chance to be able to make it, a prompt return to the larger number of pages and the larger and more easily read type.

In other words, just as a matter of plain business if for no other reason, your interests and The Ridgway Company's interests run side by side. The Company knows this and so, when considering what it thinks would be an improvement, it comes to you

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in advance to learn whether you too think it would be an improvement. If you don't think so, it would be palpably foolish to go ahead. If you do think so, it would be foolish not to go ahead, since all parties concerned see a gain in so doing. That is, of course, to go ahead when general conditions, over which neither you nor we have direct control, make it feasible to do so.

THIS is the question: Shall we or shall we not publish *Adventure* three times a month instead of twice a month? We mean with not less than the regular amount of contents, with no lowering of quality and with no other changes of any kind now considered or foreseen. Just a question of three *vs.* two a month.

I know many of you want it issued oftener, for you have written me that you do. Among other things, it would give you more stories by your favorite writers yet still give space for variety and "new blood." But we want as full an expression from as many of you as possible. I'm not wasting all these words over a piece of bunk. It ought to be self-evident that if you want it oftener it's to the Company's interest to provide it oftener, and that if you don't it's only common sense not to try to make you take it oftener.

Tell us. On a postcard, in a letter, any way you please. If you like, write just "Three times a month" or "Twice a month" and sign your name. If you feel like giving us your reasons, by all means do so. Believe me, our ears are wide open for all the information and guidance we can get on this subject.

REMEMBER, it's you readers who are going to decide this question. The Ridgway Company is going to do what you say, because it knows it is to its interest to do so. All we ask is for you to speak out. Please cast your vote.

If you want *Adventure* published oftener than three times a month, tell us that. Write "Once a week" in your communication. If you have any wishes on any other points concerning the magazine, tell us that too.

We're not doing any loud talking about what a grand magazine we're going to give you in the future, but we believe that, if general conditions give any magazine a chance, we'll be able to make *Adventure* such that it will satisfy you even better than it does now.

But first of all we want you to tell us how often you want it published. Please reach for your postcard or letter-paper right now.—A. S. H.

LOOKING AHEAD FOR DEMOCRACY

WHY should we not consider our public problems on the plain, simple, homely, common sense basis upon which we, in our wiser moments, consider our own personal problems. Why should they not be considered on that basis? Why should they be considered on any other? There are great differences between a family or a club and a nation, but is there any essential and fundamental difference? Despite all the laws and theories of economics and sociology, in both cases it is the affairs of a group having both individual and group rights and obligations.

Our failure to reason the same way in both cases is due merely to the fact that a nation's affairs are so great and so complex that they awe us, scare us out of ordinary methods of thinking, and make us take refuge in rather slavish dependence on various rules and customs that may or may not be sound and wise.

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Why not forget about complexity, which is after all only a phase, remember that big-group problems can be solved by exactly the same kind of thinking that solves little-group problems, and go at our national problems just as you go at those small enough for us to grasp easily in their entirety?

FOR example, we want to punish profiteers, unjust capitalists, public officials who sacrifice the people's interests for party or personal interests. We want to take away from those who have more money than they can spend or have any right to and give to those in bitter need. We want to execute the profiteers and those many traitors in public office. We want justice.

But, except when these hated ones have definitely violated a definite law, punishing them would not be justice. It would be rankly unfair. And I confess the primitive man in me hates to admit that this is true, for God knows I want to see them punished.

But it's this way—and you, like me, will have to admit it in your own heart:

WE AMERICANS have for generations been living under a definite system of laws and customs. It develops and changes as time goes on, but it remains essentially the same. In other words, we've been playing a certain game with rules recognized and understood by all. The rules have, many of them, been unjust and unwise, *but* we've recognized and accepted them, allowed them to continue to be the rules, gone on playing under them.

And now, because, in this game we've all been playing, the other fellows have been winning and we've been losing, we are such poor sports that we want to knock them over the heads. They've merely done what most of us were trying to do, what most of us, radicals and conservatives alike, would surely have done if we'd been in their places. That's very rotten sportsmanship even for a sandlot. And by all rules of common sense it is shamefully unfair.

These winners in our game have merely been acting as human nature generally acts. There's no sense or fairness in cussing *them*. The thing to cuss is the game. And the minute we begin cussing the game we find ourselves cussing ourselves. For we have permitted that game.

CHANGE the rules of the game by all means. God knows they need it. But let's not be poor losers and cry-babies. And above all, let's be men enough to face the fact that the badness in the game is our own fault. We could have corrected the bad rules before this if enough of us had taken sufficient interest to try. Most of us, the hundred million, have not, until recently, taken sufficient interest in our public affairs to be more than a large flock of sheep driven in whatever direction a handful of professional politicians figured would bring them most personal profits. Most of us, if we voted, kept the laws and served in war, felt we were very good citizens indeed, and didn't know enough about citizenship to realize that we were very bad citizens—sheep, shirkers, fools.

Let's waste no time and breed no unnecessary bitterness in growling at the winners in our game. Making our game a better game is going to need all our energy and thought.

AND—the one thing that always seems to me to need most emphasis—let's try to realize that it doesn't make a damn bit of difference what beautiful new rules we make for our old game or what new game we adopt if we don't *teach ourselves the rules* a whole lot better than we taught ourselves the old rules. For, if you have any real understanding of democracy, you know in your heart that the "malefactors of great wealth" and of politics haven't broken the rules any worse than have we ourselves by our negligence in the duties of citizenship. Most of all, we need to teach ourselves the rules of whatever game we may play and to teach ourselves into such understanding of democratic citizenship and individual responsibility that we'll respect the rules of our own making, promptly changing any rules that can not command our respect.

At present we're trying to escape the results of our sins by seeking for a magic remedy—building platforms, inventing new kinds of governments. There is no magic remedy. Nor can any form of government on God's green earth be sound and safe and fair if the citizens who put that government into actual practise are not doing their full and understanding share as citizens. You can not build a sound house out of rotten bricks.

The only way to make people better citizens is to teach them citizenship. The only way to teach citizenship is by definite, organized effort.

We teach individual morals. There is no reason why we can not teach civic morals.—A. S. H.

To Our Readers. As stated in "Camp-Fire" of this issue, The Ridgway Company wants *Adventure's* readers to decide how often our magazine shall be published and, whatever the decision may be, is planning to give them the best and biggest magazine in its power. General conditions bear hard on all magazines. In spite of general conditions, *Adventure* believes it has the opportunity to make big strides ahead. Because of both these facts it behooves the magazine to make the most of every possibility.

Among other things, it has been proved that the main idea of *Adventure* is a sound one. Therefore The Ridgway Company is convinced that it is common-sense to center the whole magazine directly and strongly on this main idea. To that end it has been decided to stop the "Looking Ahead for Democracy" department and use its space for fiction or for other departments bound up more closely in the magazine's central idea. The house feels, also, that, while the upheaval immediately following the war called for every kind of patriotic effort tending toward steadying all of us as citizens of a democracy, the need is now no longer so acute and there is no longer reason to sidetrack part of the space belonging to a magazine of fiction and the out-of-doors.

While I fully recognize the force of the house's arguments, I can not close up "Looking Ahead" without a feeling of real regret or without expressing my very keen appreciation of the support it has received from so many of you and my satisfaction in having met, through the department, so many Americans of the type who best insure the right working out of our country's problems.—A. S. H.

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VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

THESE services of *Adventure* are free to *any one*. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you, *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 109 Mountfort St., Boston, Mass., can supply Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.*

WILL BUY: First April, 1920; First June, 1920. Fifty Cents Each.—Address CHARLES SHEPARD, Erskine, Alberta, Canada.

WILL SELL: *Adventure* from Jan. 1917 to date. Best offer.—Address R. E. PIERCE, Stop 10, Riverside Drive, Berea, Ohio.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of this issue.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 519 Citizens Bldg., Cleveland, Ohio.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask *Adventure*," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliablity. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask *Adventure*" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. ★ Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

2. The Sea Part 1
BERIAH BROWN, Seattle Press Club, 1305 Fifth Ave., N. E., Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. ★ The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodcraft; furs, freshwater pearls, herbs; and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, 6 W. Concord Ave., Orlando, Florida. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine, Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Middle Western U. S. Part 1
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel, *Esperially* early history of Missouri Valley.

8. Middle Western U. S. Part 2
JOHN B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering Missouri, Arkansas and the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big timber sections.

9. Middle Western U. S. Part 3
LARRY ST. JOHN, Melbourne Beach, Fla. Covering Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Lake Michigan. Fishing, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, clamming, early history, legends.

10. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

11. Western U. S. Part 2 and Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. WHITEAKER, 20 Ashland Blvd., Chicago, Ill. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, natives, hunting, history, industries.

12. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California
C. R. MAHAFFEY, 381 Broadway Street, San Francisco, Cal. Covering Lower California and that part of Mexico lying south of a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, natives, commerce, business and general conditions.

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13. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 1
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 2
HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., covering southeastern Ontario and the lower Ottawa Valley. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping, aviation.

15. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Tweed, Ont., Canada. Covering Southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

16. North American Snow Countries Part 4
ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

17. North American Snow Countries Part 5
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, Carmel, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

18. North American Snow Countries, Part 6
REECE H. HAGUE, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Covering Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and Northern Keewatin. Homesteading mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel.

19. North American Snow Countries Part 7
JAS. F. B. BELFORD, Richmond, Quebec. Covering New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and southeastern Quebec. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper and wood-pulp industries, land grants, water-power.

20. Hawaiian Islands and China
P. J. HALTON, 632 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

21. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure* magazine, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

22. South America. Part 1
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure* magazine, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile; geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

23. South America Part 2
P. H. GOLDSMITH, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Covering Venezuela, the Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

24. Asia, Southern
GORDON MCCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty-Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

25. Philippine Islands
BUCK CONNOR, 1555 Wilcox Ave., Hollywood, Calif. Covering history, natives, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, exports and imports, manufacturing.

26. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Maine. Covering Japan: Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

27. Russia and Eastern Siberia
MAJOR A. M. LOCHWITZKY (Formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Austin, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalien; travel, hunting, fishing, explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

28. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, Carmel, Monterey Co., Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

29. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Frederick, Md. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

30. ★ Africa Part 3. Portuguese East Africa
R. W. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

31. ★ Africa Part 4. Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo
CHARLES BEADLE, Care Society of Authors and Composers, Central Buildings, Tothill St., Westminster, London, England. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, mining, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

32. Africa Part IV. Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand
CAPTAIN F. J. FRANKLIN, The Adventurers' Club, 8 South Clark Street, Chicago, Illinois. Climatic conditions, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, mines and minerals, opportunities for employment, direct shipping routes from United States of America, general information covering living conditions, travel and opportunities.

33. ★ New Zealand and the South Sea Islands
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen. (*Postage 8 cents.*)

34. ★ Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, Hotel Sydney, Sydney, Australia. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

FIREARMS, PAST AND PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers and ammunition. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district in question.)

A.—All Shotguns (including foreign and American makes). J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers (including foreign and American makes). D. WIGGINS, Salem, Ore.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; live bait; camping outfits; fishing trips.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union may be called upon for general information relating to Latin-American matters or for specific data. Address John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Commission, Wash., D. C.

For U. S. its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

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Karakuls Again

THE interest in the new breed of sheep—new to the U. S. anyway—still keeps Mr. Harriman awake o' nights answering letters. Here's a supplementary word from him upon the subject:

Since there have been a good many letters sent me by men interested in my letter concerning Karakul sheep, I think it only fair to turn in any further information regarding them that I secure. I have just read an article by Dr. C. C. Young, the man who introduced them into this country. Here are a few facts, as given by him:

"I have made three importations into the United States and shall make one more trip. Karakuls have proved their ability to live and accumulate fat, and yield a heavy wool clip on dry alkali weeds, the only food they had in the Summer of 1919. They are now getting fat on brush in Madera County. They will be the means of reclaiming vast areas of desert land in the Southwest. . . . The Bureau of Forestry attests their ability to subsist and thrive on brush alone. . . .

"In 1918, during a most disastrous drouth, we lost every merino lamb and thirty per cent. of the mature merino ewes, as well as sixty per cent. of our Angoras, but not one mature Karakul and only thirty per cent. of Karakul lambs"—this in Texas.

In a previous article Dr. Young stated that a three-weeks-old lamb wears a twenty-five-dollar skin. Crossed with the hardy Mexican sheep the breed lamb produces the same type of pelt. Also, the mutton is unexcelled.

The flock of Dr. Young and his associates is at Kerman, California.

Another thing worth mentioning is that a scheme is on foot to build dams to impound water, so as to irrigate every acre of the semi-arid lands of this State, which will double production and furnish farms for thousands. It has been proven beyond dispute that twenty acres of irrigated land, handled with judgment, is better than a hundred that depends upon rainfall. I know men who raised enough the first crop to more than pay for the land.

South America's Unknown Zoo

A SCIENTIFIC expedition to the Galapagos Islands seems to be a good object for some wealthy investigator to finance:

Question:—"Taking advantage of the privileges of Ask *Adventure* department, I am writing you a few inquiries concerning South America. I shall try to make them explicit and to the point.

1. Please indicate as nearly as possible those portions of South America which have not yet been explored by white or civilized men.

2. I have heard rumors of the existence of a mysterious white race of superior culture to the other aborigines somewhere in the unexplored interior—either the descendants of the Incas, or else having no connection with them. Do you have any data either first or second hand concerning this race? And from your experiences there what is your opinion about the likelihood of such a people?

3. I have heard stories to the effect that there were still existing in the vast unexplored swamps of the headwaters of the Amazon, huge, prehistoric monsters long supposed extinct. Also somewhere of the existence in Brazil of a place where probably the process of evolution stopped short and many of the land monsters are still existing.

Do you have any data from natives and travelers as to the likelihood of such a supposition? Do you know whether either of the theories has found its way yet into any written picture or romance?"—E. M. BRACKNEY, Culver, Ind.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—1. A great deal of South America has never been explored. The least known is possibly located between the interior of the Guianas and the Amazon River and from this same point to the Atlantic coast. I have never heard of this trip having been made. Many other unexplored places exist on the boundaries of Colombia and Peru, Colombia and Brazil, Peru and Brazil, Venezuela and Brazil, Bolivia and Brazil, etc.

2. I have also heard the same rumor about this race. Several men of my acquaintance have brought out rumors, but nothing definite. There is so much territory back in there that a block of land the size of the State of Texas could be lost and nothing known about it. In some such place this mysterious race might exist.

3. Off the Ecuadorian coast on the Galapagos Islands are animals, birds, insects and plant life absolutely different from that of the mainland. This has been the subject of much controversy among biologists who suppose these islands to be the last remaining land of some continent which has sunk in former times.

It is quite likely that unknown species exist in the jungles of South America that have never been seen up to the present. I believe there was an animal found a few years ago which was supposed to be the ancestor of our domesticated horse, a small, fox-sized animal with five toes. An expedition went from England to find the remains of this animal, which was killed with a club by a sailor who was making a trip on foot across the Andes. No conjecture is too wild for this immense, unknown land.

German East Africa

NOTE the specific answers which Mr. Beadle gives to Mr. De Witt in the subjoined correspondence. That's because Mr. De Witt asked specific questions. As a rule our Ask *Adventure* experts do not, because they can not, answer inquirers who want to be told "all about" a certain region:

Question:—"This is a letterful of queries, but I hope you will answer it. What is the climate and general conditions of the interior of German East Africa? Is the land all covered with tropical foliage (that is the low lands)? What are the common trees? Are there any large interior towns, and what are the means of transportation besides the railway from Tanza?

What are the minerals there, and are there any rich deposits of phosphate? Is it true that there are open pits and easy mining there? Is there a mineral mine there called miker?

What class of people inhabit it, and what is the general tongue they speak? What is the native apparel and food? Is there any license required by the English authorities to carry firearms into the country?"—JAMES DE WITT, Toledo, Ohio.

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Answer, by Mr. Beadle:—Very glad you put definite questions, which I will do my best to answer.

The climate in the interior of German East is subtropical mostly, a good deal of scrub and waterless country and in other parts very swampy and unhealthy. The present conditions—since the war—I can not tell you. Probably pulling itself together and getting more settlers for farming and fruit, cattle and pig raising.

Yes, the lowlands are covered with tropical foliage. Names I can't give of trees as they are mostly all African varieties; the work of classifying them hasn't even yet been finished. Common types: a variety of oak, olive, sycamore, and a kind of teak very hard and durable.

No large interior towns. Transport other than rail is porterage by natives. I believe many Boer settlers have introduced the ox wagon in districts where there are no tsetse flies.

Minerals. Nobody really knows yet. Gold not much discovered; have been also diamonds. Do not know of any rich deposits of phosphate in German East (late).

Have never heard of open pits there. Actual state of mining in last ten years I can not say.

Again can not say whether mica is or has been mined, but probably is there.

By "class of people" I suppose you mean native. Mostly warlike tribes as in British East. Difficult to describe other than technically. They are not so big and negroid as the blacks, say in Southern States of the U. S.

Apparel: Sometimes nothing at all; others a rag or skin round the loins. Food: Bananas, various kinds of native corns. Yes, license to carry arms required.

Put at least five cents postage on all letters addressed to Ask *Adventure* editors who live outside the U. S. Always enclose at least five cents in International Reply Coupons for answer.

Semi-Tropical Alaska

WELL, that is to say semi-tropical in a manner of speaking:

Question:—"I recently read an article in the *Youth's Companion* telling of the discovery of a sort of semi-tropical forest, containing hot springs and a great deal of animal life, in the region north of the Porcupine River—whether in Alaska or northern Canada the article does not state. It was discovered by a member of the Royal North West Mounted Police while on a scouting tour, but could not be explored, as provisions were running low. Have you read anything concerning this? I would like to take a trip in that region some day and would like to have some information on travel in the Arctic.

1. Where is the closest point to the Porcupine River reached by railroad?
2. What is the usual mode of transport for a small exploring party?
3. What equipment, clothing, food, guns, etc., should be taken?
4. What are the chances for game in that region?
5. What is the character of the soil and vegetation?
6. What kind of weather and temperatures may be expected?
7. Where can I obtain maps and other information concerning the Arctic region of northern Alaska and Canada?"—C. FOSTER CLARK, Bay City, Mich.

Answer, by Mr. Solomons:—The hot springs referred to in the article—which I did not see—were doubtless like others in Alaska, though they may have been more extensive and have influenced the air sufficiently to have produced the effect on the mind of the Mounted Police boys of "semi-tropical" conditions. What, they meant, I dare say, was that vegetable life was luxuriant about the place—always true of the vicinity of northern hot springs. The soil keeps thawed and warm, and even the air is, in still weather, warmed. Hence the luxuriance; but the species of vegetable life are not different from those of the general habitat. It's great for vegetables, though. At the Hot Springs near Salmon River, Seward Peninsula (the Nome country) a flourishing business was maintained as a salubrious resort and as a vegetable farm.

Naturally, too, animals will favor the place. Do not, however, expect to find a bit of the South American jungle in both fauna and flora at that place.

The Porcupine River is reached by river steamer either up the Yukon from St. Michael, to which ocean steamers take you, or down that river by steamer from White Horse, the terminus of the White Pass & Yukon Railway from Skagway, reached by steamers plying the Inside Passage from Seattle and Vancouver. It will cost you in the neighborhood of $150 to get to the Porcupine from Seattle.

You could reach the same point DOWN THE PORCUPINE, by the All-Canadian route of Klondike fame—or infamy! Parties still write me that they are about to start for it.

One route thither—the main one—is known as the Edmonton Route, which is a regular route into the Mackenzie River basin. You fare on for a year or so to fairly near the mouth of that river, in the Arctic regions, and then ascend the Rat River westward and southward to the head of the Porcupine or near it. The portages are short and easy, comparatively.

Very brisk and skilful *voyageurs* can make the mouth of the Porcupine from Edmonton (after half-circumnavigating the north end of our continent) in a couple of years. By the Yukon a couple of weeks is plenty, or about right, barring delays.

Fort Yukon is the settlement at the mouth of the Porcupine, but I suspect that there is little to be obtained there now, and it would probably pay an expedition to ship up (or down, whichever was the most favorable in time and cost) the Yukon all supplies needed. Get a government map from the Geological Survey for geographical relations of all these places.

The Arctic Circle hits Fort Yukon, and there is some class, you'd better believe, to your expedition. It's in the Arctic region, but you would not believe it in the Summer time. You could in all probability get a good river-boat—which means a poling-boat, with perhaps a light barge for the lower part of the river to transport a big outfit as far as possible—at Fort Yukon; or you could make one quickly, with lumber (shipped in, for safety and time-saving) or you could buy a poling-boat at some larger settle-

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ment and stick it on the river-boat to Fort Yukon. Then, loading it, or them, or it and a barge, the world is all yours clear up to the head of the river (called Bell River, where the Rat portage comes across—a flattish, confusing country, rather dreary, but interesting). The main reach of the Porcupine is not, however, dreary, in a subarctic scenic sense.

Look up a magazine article in *MClure's* or *Munsey's* or something published about 1913 or 14 by Emerson Hough, telling all about the country as he saw it during his trip over the Rat Portage and down the Porcupine. The old Hudson Bay Company used to have stations here. Rampart House (doubtless only ruins unless recently rehabilitated) was about on the north-south boundary between the Yukon Territory and Alaska.

There is game—caribou in plenty at the right times and places; always small game and some bear, and fish and fowl galore. Of course there's plenty of fur—fox, muskrat in scads, and mink; marten less and wolverine scarce. Land otter, I *think*. No beaver now (if ever); squirrel and lots of weasel (ermine, up there) if I'm not greatly mistaken. I know I've traded for lots of them that came from not far off.

As to soil and vegetation—it's the Arctic variety. There is spruce and birch, cottonwood and willows. Spruce makes the foresty, pretty, homey effect where it occurs along the river and in ravines. But like most of the Arctic expanse there is bareness in the great stretches between rivers, and often between tributaries near the river. But of vegetation of the low tundra variety—berries, shrubs, grasses—all that is riotous, and very beautiful and interesting.

The country has been only superficially prospected, for the Summers are durn short and it's pretty cold for prospecting in Winter, although if you find superficial prospects in Summer and can make Winter quarters there the Winter's the time to burn down and see what you've got. There have not been any strikes on the Porcupine, however, important enough to have made a stampede or to result in any camp.

The Winter temperatures are low, but the air is still and there is no danger except to reckless people that get too far away from their food and sleeping-bags and then get panicky.

As to equipment—see my information on that subject in an *Adventure* (Ask *Adventure*) of perhaps a year and a half or two years ago. It's too long to repeat here, and I haven't the exact date of the published reply I am referring to.

An "outfit" is a very elastic thing, like the "outfits" in an American home. It all depends on the purse, the tastes, and the pioneering aptitudes and experience of the adventurers. The old boys did it with a few extra pair of socks, their rifles, axes and a boat-load—a few hundred pounds to a ton—of staples like flour, beans, rice and sow-belly. Also they sometimes had a tent and usually some good blankets. They got foot-gear and parkeys from the Indians.

I could tell you a book on outfits—in fact a book on each sub-division of it. Ascending a river, however, means economy of weight, unless you have plenty of time.

Ask me specific questions based on the number in your expected party, the depth of the purse you're willing to devote to it, how long you want to stay, *et cetera*, and I will give you specific answers. Meantime, *adios*.

Picking Squirrels Out of the River

HERE'S a new way of collecting meat for the stew:

Question:—"A friend and myself are planning a little hunting-trip this Fall and we are thinking of going to Cheraw, S. C., and buying or building a boat and going down the Great Pee Dee River possibly as far as Georgetown, S. C. Do you think we would find good hunting on such a trip; and would we find any lands we could hunt on without being molested?

Killing a great deal of game is not our object; we will be satisfied with small game enough for the pot, and in fact I intend to carry nothing but a .22 cal. rifle.

I lived on the Pee Dee about fifteen years ago, but my knowledge was limited to about twenty miles of the river. Since I was there most of the timber has been cut, but I understand that the hunting is still very good.

Any information you can give me on the conditions along the Pee Dee will be very much appreciated; or if you can suggest a better trip that will be also.

Do you know of any good trip that could be taken in this State similar to the one we have planned?"—FLEETWOOD LANNEAN, Hendersonville, N. C.

Answer, by Mr. Liebe:—Concerning a trip down Pee Dee, it ought to be a pretty good one, unless the weather is bad. You should find plenty of squirrel, wood-hen, flicker, some woodcock, with the possibility of larger game if you hunt right and hard enough. When the swamps are frozen so that ducks can't alight in them, this river is good for duck.

It is best to get a hunting license, though you might get along without being molested. You are not apt to have trouble with land-owners in hunting on wild lands; better ask, however, on lands that are settled up.

I never made a trip like this the full length of the Pee Dee, but I have gone down the Santee from the confluence of the Congaree and Waterce Rivers, and it is a good trip. This might possibly be better than the Pee Dee trip.

I suggest your carrying a big keg for water, and filling it at every possible chance. You will find long stretches on any of the above-named rivers where you can't get water that is fit to drink.

Since you will be going down-stream, I advise building a boat big enough to cook and sleep in and covering it; a semi-house-boat, you know. Campfire on a bed of sand in the center. Beds at each end. Be careful, of course, of fire; it might sink you at night.

A lot of times you can bump your boat slightly against a dead tree in the edge of the water and scare a whole family of squirrels out. Get them quickly after they fall into the water as they sink when their fur gets all wet.

Put at least five cents postage on all letters addressed to Ask *Adventure* editors who live outside the U. S. Always enclose at least five cents in International Reply Coupons for answer.

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LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

QUINBY, JAMES A. Used to live in San Jose, Cal. Was a classmate of mine at L. S. J. U. 1914 to 1916. Last heard of him when he was at Camp Lewis with the 91st Division, 361st Infantry. Saw his name in casualty lists about July, 1918, listed under "severely wounded." Wrote to him several times but received no answer. Any one who can let me know anything of his whereabouts will greatly oblige. If you see this, Jim, write to your old bunkie of the "Arroyo Hondo," care of the 15th Infantry, Tientsin, China.—P. W. B., JR., 1st Leiut., U. S. A.

CHENEY, E. H. Rancher near Walla Walla and Dayton, Washington, fifteen years up to 1911. Later removed to Southern Oregon. Relatives anxious to have any information of his whereabouts.—Address L. T. 409, care of *Adventure.*

CHENEY, S. H. Physician near Bluff City, Bauxite and Little Rock, Arkansas, of late years. Relatives will appreciate any information.—Address L. T. 409, care of *Adventure.*

TRIBBLE, RALPH. Last address known to me—5728 3rd Ave. North, Birmingham, Ala. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address CORPORAL FRED TRIBBLE, Hdq. Co., 45th Inf., Camp Dix, N. J.

LANAHAN, BOB. "Digger." Please write. Address HARRY A. PIKE, Northwood, Iowa.

CARPENTER, ELMER. Last heard of in Memphis, Tenn., in 1915. Has white hair, blue eyes. Please write to your old pal and friend.—PVT. ELVIE SMITH, 11th Company, C. A. C., Ft. Sherman, Canal Zone, Panama.

LUCA, DIMAGGIO. Brother. Last seen working his way north. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address MRS. PROVIDENCE GANCI, 2605 Royal St., New Orleans, La.

RUPERT, JOSEPH. Brother. Formerly lived in Los Angeles, Cal. Last heard of from Clifton, Ariz., and expected to go to New Mexico. Joe, write to your sister.—Address MAE SIMKINS, Hotel Royal, Jackson, Miss.

DIVEN, DAVID WARD. Formerly 2nd Lt. San. Corps, U. S. A. B. H. 88, Savenay, France. Last seen at St. Nazaire, France. Discharged at Camp Travis, Texas, August 2, 1919. Known to have lived in San Antonio, Texas. "Benedictine," old pal, please write to your old side kick "Mac" of B. H. 88. Am free of all strings and "rarin' to go." Let me hear from you.—Address R. MCCORMICK, 5130 Lincoln Ave., Detroit, Mich.

FARRELL, JOSEPH P. Last heard of with Co. E, 2nd Batt., S. C. R., A. E. F., somewhere in France. Would also like to hear from any friends or shipmates. Any information will be appreciated.—Address JOHN J. HICKEY, 25 South St., New York, N. Y.

WALKER, FRED. Sailor. Born in England. Was six years in Australia, also in Chinese Customs Service. Worked in U. M. C., Bridgeport. Grasshopper Charlie would like to hear from you. Couldn't find you in San Francisco when I came from Alaska.—Address CHAS. B. NICHOLS, care of *Adventure.*

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

CUNNINGHAM, JULIET. Lived in St. Louis, Mo., in 1909 and 1910. Have important information that would be of interest to her.—Address HEETHER S. WRAY, P. O. Box 613, Ranger, Texas.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

KENCH, FRANK. Brother. Age about twenty-two, dark hair, medium height. Last heard from in Buffalo Springs, Texas. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address MISS HELEN KENCH, care of Mrs. O. W. Johnson, Lansing, Iowa.

SIMS, WAYNE J. I have a proposition that I think would be of interest to you. Write to your old pal of Panama days.—Address LE ROY C. CARTER, care Royal Hotel, Maulmein, India.

BLACKBURN, GEORGE W. Last heard of in Las Vegas, Nevada, April, 1913. Worked in railroad shop as a machinist. Height, five feet eight and one-half inches, dark brown hair and blue eyes. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated by his mother.—Address MRS. F. BLACKBURN, 3928 N. Percy St., Philadelphia, Pa.

REED, FORREST B. Last heard of in Seattle, Washington, running a switch-tower for N. P. R. R. Age sixty-one. Father, where are you? May perhaps be in Old Soldiers Home.—Address HEINIE, care H. W. Reed, Florence, Arizona.

JONES, FRANK. Last heard of in Holden, W. Va. Believed to have joined the army. Any information will be appreciated.—Address ALBERT JONES, 1209 N. S. Street, Ironton, Ohio.

STORY, CAPT. SYDNEY S. 121 "Western Irish" Canada. Was invalided to Canada in 1916 and last heard of in New Orleans. Have important news for him relative to financial matters.—Address CAPT. HERBERT C. MOUNTS, St. Francis Hotel, San Francisco, Cal.

GRAY, GENE. Last heard of in McAlester, Okla. Will you please write your old pal Carl? Very important.—Address C. M. PELLEY, care Lester Donon, East Palestine, Ohio.

BASSETT, FRANK A. Last heard of in Pittsburg, Pa., 1901. Any information concerning his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address WALTER E. BASSETT, 47 Jackson St., Taunton, Mass.

FORMER members of 269th Aero Squadron. Any one acquainted with former Pvt. A. R. (Al.) Bone is requested to communicate with his mother.—MRS. A. E. BONE, 3205 Ave. R ½, Galveston, Texas.

WEBSTER, E. M. Newspaper and advertising man. Age about fifty, height five feet seven inches, weight about 122 pounds, light complexion, stubby mustache, slightly mixed with gray, blue eyes, wears glasses and smokes cigarets. Last heard from in Nashville, Tenn., June, 1918. Mrs. A. J. died in February. News of very great importance awaits him. One thousand dollars reward for information concerning him. Ned, please wire or write to LOTTIE, care C. K. WEBSTER, 638 South Alvarado St., Los Angeles, Cal.

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HERBERT, SIDNEY. Anglo-Argentine, ex-officer, Mercantile Marine, trooper 1st. Brabant's Horse, South Africa, 1900, Sergeant C C C C and clerk 1 Y pay-office, Cape Town, 1901. C. W. S. inquires.—Address L. T. 410, care of *Adventure*.

DESCENDANT of Ezekiel Hopkins who wrote the letter in Camp-Fire, page 178, Mid-August, 1920, issue. Please communicate with WADE BUCKWALD, 11th Floor, Wright & Callender Bldg., Los Angeles, Cal.

STALKER, JAMES. Age about twenty-one. Father and mother died at Paisley in Scotland, 1904, and he was taken by an uncle named Black to Tarbert Lock Fyne, and then to either America or Canada. Maybe Winnipeg. His sisters Annie, Bessie and Ina would like to hear from him.—Address MRS. BESSIE COTTON, 1603 Clinton Ave., Minneapolis, Minn.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

FREDERICKS, ERICK. Last heard of in Liverpool, England, on a little farm on the outskirts of Liverpool, about fifteen years ago. Would like to hear from him or some one who knows of his whereabouts.—Address his niece, JOSEPHINE ANDERSON, maiden name; MRS. JEFFERSON WINKLE, 294 N. 12th St., Marshfield, Oregon.

ASTOR, MISS MATTIE. WHEAT, MRS. LULA. Last heard of in New Orleans, La., in 1917. Any information will be appreciated by their brother.—Address PVT. W. H. ASTOR, Co. K., 33rd Inf., Culebra, C. Z.

TIBBETTS, RIFLEMAN MARTELLE A. C Co., 259th Bn., Can. Rifles. HODGSON, JOSEPH (Cook), or any of the fellows who remember Pvt. Percy Laidlaw, night cook C Co., 1st Royal Quebec Regt. "Happy," the cross-eyed M. P., or any of the old Yankee-Canadian Crew write me.—Address P. LAIDLAW, 1416 Dakota Ave., Richmond Hill, L. I., N. Y.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

HASTLAR, GAL BREATH; Ruth Gilfillan; Jack P. Robinson; Roy Ozmer; Miss Jimmie Banks; O. B. Franklin; Lieut. Wm. S. Hilles; G. H. Atkins; G. E. Hungerford; A. Gaylord; E. J. Moran; F. S. Emerson; E. Murphy; H. E. Copp; J. E. Warner; Sinn Cardie; C. E. Wilson; T. T. Bennett; L. E. Patten; James Mosse; R. W. Kimsey; C. H. Huntington; D. Palowe.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the Mid-December or first January issues of Adventure. They can get the name of the inquirer from this magazine:

BAKER, Wm.; Behrens, E. A.; Bragg, William H.; Campbell; Cantero, Marcelo A.; Vincente, Renulfo E.; Claiborne, Harry E.; Clementson, Anton; Cohen, Jacob; Dorais, A. R.; Dutch Mack; Farrell, Howard (Duke); Ferris, John and James; Fitch, Leslie H.; Hammer or Hamner, Lulu V.; Hurley, James; Jack; Keith, Joyce; LaVelle, Miss Billie or Beatrice; Loonie; Mack; MacKenzie, William J.; Meyers, O. H.; Miller, Orville, Edward; Miller, Peter; Morris, William, Jr.; Newland, John Wesley; Parker, Carl M.; Quinby, James A.; Russell, William Thomas; St. Amond, Marcel; Schreiber, Carl; Storey, Albert; Weekes, George Lewis or Eddie Lewis; Wheeler, Bill; Wilson, Earl D.; Yunker, Miss Maude.

MISCELLANEOUS: McConologue, Corporal James, or any men of Co. C, 5th Field Signal Bn.

UNCLAIMED mail is held by Adventure for the following persons, who may obtain it by sending us present address and proof of identity.

ALDRIDGE, F. P.; Beaton, Sgt. Major G. M.; Benson, Edwin Worth; Bertsch, Elizabeth; Bonner, Major J. S.; Mrs. Brownell; Carpenter, Capt. Robert S.; "Chink"; Chisholm, D. F. R.; Cleve, Jim; Coles, Bobby; Cook, Elliot D.; Cook, William N.; Cosby, Arthur F.; Crashley, Wm. T.; Curtiss, D. A.; Eager, Paul Roman; Fairfax, Boyd; Fisher, Sgt. R.; Garson, Ed.; Green, Billy; Green, W.; Hale, Robert E.; Harris, Walter J.; Hoffman, J. M.; Hughes, Frank E.; Hunt, Daniel O'Connell; Jackson, Robert R.; Kohlhammer, Jack; Kuckaby, William Francis; Kuhn, Edward; Kutcher, Sgt. Harry; Lafler, Mrs. Harry; Lancaster, C. E.; Larisey, Jack; Lauder, Harry; Lee, Dr. C.; Lee, Capt. Harry, A. R. C.; Lee, Dr. William R.; Lewis, Warburton; "Lonely Jock"; Lovett, Harold S.; McAdams, W. B.; MacDonald, Tony; Madsen, Sgt. E. E.; Nelson, Frank Lovell; O'Hara, Jack; Parker, G. A.; Parker, Dr. M.; Parrott, Pvt. D. C.; Phillips, Buffington; Phipps, Corbett C.; Pigeon, A. H.; Raphelson, Sampson; Rich, Wagoner, Bob; Rinkenback, Frank; Rundle, Merrill G.; Saloway, Jack M.; Schmidt, G.; Scott, Pvt. James F.; Swan, George L.; Tripp, Edward N.; Van Tyler, Chester; Von Gelucke, Byron; Ward, Frank B.; Williams, W. P.; J. C. H.; W. W. T.; L. T. 348; S. 177284; 439; WS-XV.

PLEASE send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you. Address L. B. BARRETTO, care of *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD
FIRST FEBRUARY ISSUE

In addition to the complete novel mentioned on the second contents page, the following stories come to you in the next issue:

THE HEART OF THE RANGE A Five-Part Story Part III — *William Patterson White*
The bad-man combination finds *Racey* on the job.

LAW WEST OF THE PECOS — *Harry A. and Ellen Kyne Collings*
A judge and a newspaperman set out to clean up a rough town.

ZOZOMEE — *Gordon Young*
A double theft with strange consequences.

GOOMASAKA MAKES GOOD — *F. St. Mars*
In the South American jungles *Goomasaka*, the alligator, justifies herself.

LINES OF CLEAVAGE — *L. Patrick Greene*
As a philantropist the *Major* draws diamonds but plays hearts.

THE WORLD'S OPINION — *Chester L. Saxby*
How a sinking ship brought *Arnie* happiness.

HOOLEY'S HEN HASTENER — *Charles Tenney Jackson*
Raises chickens in a nut-house.

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When Rattles Stru

Judge!

When you sent me up for fo. you called me a rattlesnake. I am one—anyhow, you hear me rattling now. One year after I got to the pen, my daughter died of—well, they said it was poverty and the disgrace together. You've got a daughter, Judge, and I'm going to make you know how it feels to lose one. I'm free now, and I guess I've turned to rattlesnake all right. Look out when I strike.

Yours respectfully,
RATTLESNAKE.

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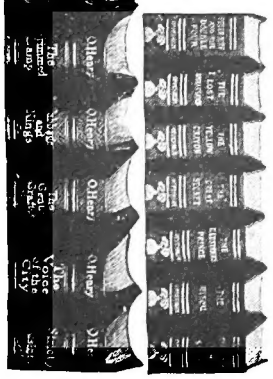

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